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THE STORY OF THE LYRIC THEATRE HAMMERSMITH

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THE STORY OF THE LYRIC THEATRE HAMMERSMITH

BY

NIGEL PLAYFAIR

With an *Introduction* by ARNOLD BENNETT, an *Epilogue* by A. A. MILNE, *Contributions* and *Letters* from ST. JOHN ERVINE, FREDERIC AUSTIN, etc.: and *Illustrations* after LOVAT FRASER, SHERINGHAM, ZINKEISEN, KAPP

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DEDICATION

To *May*, *Giles*, *Lyon* and *Andrew*
Lovers of the Lyric, Hammersmith
and
Its severest critics

ma la natura la dà sempre scema,
similmente operando all' artista,
Ch' ha l'abito dell' arte e man che trema.

Paradiso—Canto XIII

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INTRODUCTION

IN connection with the history of the Lyric, Hammersmith, I wish very briefly to discuss three subjects.

The first is the institution known as the "backer." Next to the landlord the backer is the most abused person in the world of the stage—perhaps justly, perhaps unjustly. He is said to demand, in return for risking his capital, a deciding voice in the selection of plays—and of players. He is even known to force his own plays (which invariably fail) on the manager for whom he signs cheques. As a rule he loses money. A high light of the revue world informed me a few months ago that backers never made profits out of a musical show. The statement was probably exaggerated, but there is a lot of tragic truth in it. Certainly far more money is lost than made in the theatre. Certainly, also, backers would lose less money if they confined themselves to being theatrical capitalists, without meddling further in matters which they profoundly misunderstand. Managers are often very stupid, but they are rarely so stupid as their capitalists.

When, after the historic interview with Nigel Playfair in his dressing-room at the Royalty Theatre, related by the author in this book, I went forth to collect the capital which I had rashly promised him, I bore these views well in mind. I first mentioned the Lyric scheme to Sir Harold Snagge, at a club lunch. Before I could ask him for money he offered me £1,000. I said to him:

"You will probably drop every penny of it. And anyhow, you will have no control whatever over the use of it."

He maintained his offer. I then went to Lord Beaverbrook, and similarly addressed him. He furnished £1,000. I then said to him:

"Can you support me with Lord Rothermere and Sir Edward Hulton?"

He said he would. He did. And Lord Rothermere and Sir Edward Hulton came in with £1,000 each. After the same fashion, I enlisted one or two other bankers, bill-brokers and similar people of the kind in whose sight £1,000 is no more than fourpence in mine.

I was asked whether I should "come in" myself. I said:

"Positively not, beyond taking shares sufficient to justify me for directorship! Nothing would induce me to put money into any theatrical enterprise. Time is money. I risk my time in theatres, and I will not risk both time and money."

I must say that I thought I had been rather clever, for in addition to obtaining millionaire-capitalists I had obtained the proprietors of about ninety-nine per cent. of the London press. The terrible capitalist press, however, has not broken its neck in trying to serve the interests of the Lyric, Hammersmith. It has frequently ignored our productions, more frequently damned them with faint praise, and sometimes abused them. Not long since we presented the finest play of modern times, and one illustrious organ, the property of a prominent shareholder, described it as "fatuous drivel." I was moved to complain seriously about this outrage. But did I get any redress? I did not.

Still, I willingly admit that the millionaires have never tried to interfere in the management of the theatre. They have never suggested a play, nor an artist. They have never attended a shareholders' meeting. And I much doubt whether they have ever attended a first night. They have, indeed, behaved in an ideal manner, and set an example which I recommend heartily to all backers. I admit also that I buoyed them up with false promises. I swore to them that they would lose their money, and they have not lost it—yet.

The second subject is the "unlucky theatre." Nigel Play-

fair took what might fairly have been described as the unluckiest theatre in London. It is hidden in a slum; the slum lies off a street that the West End had never heard of, and the cab fare to which from the West End is about 4s. The trains of the Metropolitan Railway shriek, grind, and roar within twenty yards of the building. And I imagine that the theatre had not had a success, or half a success, for about twenty years. We were laughed at for the madness of leasing such a theatre. We heard a very great deal about unlucky theatres. But I have never believed in the existence of the unlucky theatre. I have only believed in the existence of the theatre where unpopular productions are offered.

Three West End theatres used to be regarded as unlucky by the entire theatrical profession: the Royalty, the Kingsway and the Court. The Royalty came into the hands of the daring firm of Vedrenne and Eadie. I have had four plays done there. The first ran for about thirty performances, the second for about a hundred, the third for over six hundred, and the fourth for nearly three hundred. The Royalty is now worth at least three times what it was when I started there, and I reckon that (with Edward Knoblock) I have helped to put about £150,000 unearned increment into the coffers of the landlord and the lessee of this "unlucky" theatre. The Kingsway had a terrible name for misfortune. Nobody would look at it. "Kingsway" was the theatrical way of spelling the word "bankruptcy." It could be hired for about 3¾d. a decade. It came into the hands of Granville-Barker, and, right off, Bernard Shaw and I had, between us, thirteen hundred performances of two plays there, one of which had been hawked all over the West End for two years.

Anyhow, I had had generous proof that unlucky theatres did not exist. And I felt no fear on that score for the Lyric, Hammersmith. Before a baby could learn to talk the Lyric, Hammersmith, had begun to beat every record

in the West End, save only " Chu Chin Chow." I am now unalterably established in my ancient belief that the public, such is their hunger for real entertainment, will go anywhere, and submit to any inconvenience, in order to obtain it.

The third subject is popular taste. I submit that the average West End manager (there is at least one exception) obstinately underrates the intelligence of the public, and that more and more rapidly the public is outstripping the managers in this particular. Only a playwright who has tried to sell plays not exactly like all other plays can measure the cowardice and the reactionary imbecility of managers. Managers still continue to produce any kind of worthlessness, provided that it is in the antique tradition, gives no food for thought, offends none of the susceptibilities which they suppose the public to possess. They go on and they go on. Facts beat against the iron doors of their minds, but they will not open. At the Lyric, Hammersmith, no play or piece has been given which the Directors (Nigel Playfair, Alistair Tayler and myself) did not unanimously believe to have considerable artistic merit. There is no exception to this. West End managers are fond of referring to the Lyric Board as amateurs. Nevertheless the Lyric Board, in face of some unique difficulties, has successfully remained in management for seven years, and the Lyric Theatre has made handsome profits, on the policy of trusting the intelligence of the public.

The public has even taught lessons in faith to the Lyric Board. At the rehearsals of " The Way of the World," for instance, I said that the production was marvellous but that it was bound to fail. I knew in my bones that it would fail. It succeeded handsomely, and played to record houses. Again, when it was decided to ask Bernard Fagan to produce " The Cherry Orchard " at the Lyric I said from the beginning that it could not possibly succeed. And I was agreed

with, though we were determined whatever happened to present the finest play of modern times. I could not learn from experience. For a week after the production we were convinced we had a failure, and we rapidly made unchangeable arrangements for another production. Then the business leaped up and showed a profit, and " The Cherry Orchard " —" The Cherry Orchard," a play utterly revolutionary, a play outraging every convention and every imagined susceptibility, a play which no manager would have looked at a fortnight earlier—" The Cherry Orchard " marched off to the West End. Whatever the fortunes of " The Cherry Orchard " in the West End, the mere transfer of it to a fashionable theatre marked an epoch in the history of the London stage. It is a final proof of the evolution of public taste. In another fifty years the average West End manager may just possibly discern that something progressive has happened in the most conservative of little worlds.

ARNOLD BENNETT

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

WHAT IS THE USE OF THE THEATRE?

I FEEL that now and then, and on occasions like this one, it is a very good thing for the caterer and the catered-for to meet together for an interchange of views on the subjects in which they are both interested. I feel at the same time that it is more important that the customers, when they have got their provider to state his case in black and white, should be able to inform him of what they think about the wares which he provides, than that they should have to sit and suffer yet another time in silence while he calmly tells them how fortunate they are to be able to purchase anything at all from him, and to lecture them on what should be the nature of their passive demands. I hope, therefore, you will look upon the few hours you spend reading these pages as a mere preliminary to a fusillade of criticisms which you will remorselessly fire off at me (through the post) when they are over. I assure you that I am much more likely and far more ready to learn about my own business from an intelligent body of readers than to teach them anything which they have not known before.

And, by the way, though I used for convenience' sake these expressions of customer and purchaser, they are really not very apt; and they do not suggest relations which are as pleasant as they ought to be. I prefer to think that the theatre manager and his audience are collaborators and partners.

For want of a better title for my preface I chose this—"What is the use of the Theatre?" partly because it seemed to me a pretty wide and comprehensive one: and, therefore,

however discursive the remarks I make in it may be, I shall not be accused of wandering beyond what politicians call "the terms of reference"; but partly also because it is a question which, consciously or unconsciously, a very great many people who are interested in the well-being of the community at large are beginning to ask both their friends and themselves. Twenty years ago the answer they would have given to themselves, or received from others, would have been fairly obvious and conclusive; though it might vary in form. It would have been: "The Theatre is of no *use* at all . . . it is a pleasant pastime or it is a waste of time . . . it bores or it amuses . . . at the best it keeps young people out of mischief and their elders out of the public-houses: but it is of no serious *use*."

In these days, however, owing to the insistence of a small but very obstinate set of people, this attitude is changing—changing as much as I hope the attitude of sensible people towards public-houses is changing! At any rate, I hope the time is coming when we shall no longer talk foolishness about "keeping people out of the public-houses." We must see to it either that our public-houses are places into which people when they are happy and at leisure should be encouraged to go, or we must abolish them altogether. And that is the attitude which I should like to see taken about the theatre also!

As, personally, I live by and for the theatre, I am naturally inclined to think its prosperity and position in the life of the nation a matter of very great importance; at the same time I appreciate fully the objection to what I may call the "Dangle" attitude on the subject which only places its exponents in a position to excite ridicule. If you will allow me, I will illustrate what I mean by the Dangle Attitude by quoting a few lines from the first act of the best burlesque in the English language, "The Critic." It is more than

likely that none of you have ever witnessed this particular scene upon the stage, because, in the few-and-far-between performances of "The Critic," it is nearly always very foolishly omitted.

Mr. and Mrs. Dangle are seated at breakfast, and she starts the day (as I'm sorry to say was the bad custom of the eighteenth century, now happily and I hope universally abandoned) by giving him a good talking to:

Mrs. Dangle: Lord, Mr. Dangle, why will you plague me about such nonsense? Now the plays are begun I shall have no peace. Isn't it sufficient to make yourself ridiculous by your passion for the theatre, without continually teasing me to join you? Why can't you ride your hobby-horse without desiring to place me on a pillion behind you, Mr. Dangle?

Mr. Dangle: Nay, my dear, I was only going to read——

Mrs. Dangle: No, no; you will never read anything that's worth listening to. You hate to hear about your country; there are letters every day with Roman signatures, demonstrating the certainty of an invasion, and proving that the nation is utterly undone. But you will never read anything to entertain one.

Mr. Dangle: What has a woman to do with politics, Mrs. Dangle?

Mrs. Dangle: And what have you to do with the theatre, Mr. Dangle? And to employ yourself so idly at such an alarming crisis as this too—when, if you had the least spirit, you would have been at the head of one of the Westminster associations—or trailing a volunteer pike in the Artillery Ground! But you—o' my conscience, I believe, if the French were landed to-morrow, your first inquiry would be whether they had brought a theatrical troop with them.

Mr. Dangle: Mrs. Dangle, it does not signify—I say the stage is the Mirror of Nature, and the actors are the Abstract and brief Chronicles of the Time: and pray what can a man of sense study better ?

Well, there are some Dangles still surviving; but not, I hope and trust, among my readers. They are more to be found, I think, among those critics who year by year write large volumes about the theatre, advocating its claims to State and Municipal assistance, praising its inestimable value as a factor in our daily life, till your good citizen may well begin to think that he has committed high treason if he is not seen sitting in the stalls with his entire family at least once a week ! Somewhere between this attitude and the earlier attitude of which I have already spoken—the attitude of complete indifference or disapproval—which was prevalent during the childhood of some of us and the lives of our parents, I believe you would agree with me that the truth lies.

To suppose on the one hand that people who do not patronize the theatre may not have other delightful means of recreation at their command is an absurdity. They may have their libraries, their concert rooms, to say nothing of Man's architecture and Nature's. They have the defence that so little in the modern theatre is anything but a poor reward for their trouble and expense in visiting it. But, on the other hand, this is often a weak and poor excuse; for as has been wisely said, "The drama's laws the drama's patrons give," and sensible people must and should know that if they stay away altogether they are simply handing over a powerful institution for good to Riot and Inanity. You will not successfully ask me to agree with you that the theatre is intended to be a mere idle recreation for tired people, using the word recreation in its lowest sense. On the con-

trary, I believe that it is or should be nothing of the kind. Used properly it should act as a stimulant, not an anodyne. It should not be a method of birking our daily problems; on the contrary, it should be a convenient way of concentrating our attention upon them, and of enlarging our vision so that we may learn to sympathize with and understand the problems which react on the lives of other people; problems, I mean, which may not present themselves in the comparatively narrow sphere in which each of us of necessity has to move during his ordinary working days. That is the duty of the theatre as I conceive it, translated as it may be in terms of music and of tragedy, of laughter and of song. With its exposition of problems it must bring, too, its own comfort and mercy; and this surely is the duty of art in all its many manifestations (of which the theatre is one, or rather a combination of many, enjoying the advantage of a specially wide appeal and a special attraction to most people).

If, then, the theatre can boast these attributes, you will be asking me how it came about that it uses them so seldom. For it would be a merest affectation either for you or me to pretend that the average theatrical performances to be seen in London and without have any but the slenderest connection with anything that can be called art, or philosophy, or culture. They have only and perhaps nearly always, some vaguely romantic or macabre interest . . . like the three-volume novel of Kipling's poem, "they may carry tired people to the Islands of the Blest," in a certain sense of the word blessing. But their appeal is generally based on mere prettiness, trivial excitement, the circumstances of their surrounding, their snatches of music, the tipping up and down of seats, the glamour and mystery which shrouds—or used to shroud, till the picture papers blew them all away—those who minister to them, the drive home through the

deserted streets under the lamplight, and I know not what other odd diversions and sights and sounds.

These things the true playgoer loves, and there is small harm in his loving them, but they cannot be made a State affair; nor can there be based upon them an appeal to Duty and Righteousness for support.

Those people who are asking for a National Theatre (and they include many very wise men and women whose advocacy is entirely disassociated from any commercial motive), found their claim upon something very much more than this. They would take, I suppose, the analogy of the great museums and picture galleries in London and other large centres. They would point out what is obviously true, that the great drama of the past and present, from Shakespeare and Jonson through Dryden and Sheridan, down to Shaw and Granville-Barker and O'Neill in our own day, is one of the most glorious heritages of our race, and that this heritage languishes in decay; for great drama can only really live when it is acted and pictured in the theatre for which it was intended. And surely in many respects, if not in all, the apology holds good.

For instance, on the subject of public demand.

If you go along the street and ask every casual stranger you meet whether he feels any need for a National Theatre, ninety per cent. will say "No" bluntly, and often quite firmly.

If you asked them if they needed a National Picture Gallery most of them would probably be a little more accommodating. They would not, indeed, raise their eyes to heaven as the Frenchmen and Germans might do, and tell you they could not live without it; but most of them in the true English manner might go so far as to say "they supposed so." That is merely because they have been brought up with the institution in being, and their taste has been shaped accordingly.

Nevertheless it seems to me a tragedy that whole generations can grow up without any but the most fitful and haphazard opportunities of knowing their Shakespeare and their Shaw, though the way is made easy for them to know their Reynolds and their Blake and their Morland and their John.

Of course I recognize well enough the arguments (now mainly economic) upon the other side. You pay a heavy price for a picture, but once acquired the expenditure on its upkeep and display is comparatively negligible. Fashions and taste change, but the quality of the picture remains the same—if not for ever, at any rate for, say, a nine hundred and ninety-nine years' lease of life. For plays and for operas, on the other hand, though you have that one advantage of being able to follow the changes in taste and fashion, even when you have your building and equipment your running expenses are enormous. To set against them it is true that people will pay more as a rule to see a play than a collection of pictures; but they will not be—or in the past they have not been—ready to pay consistently for anything like a classical repertory; and not even in far more theatre-proud nations than our own can a State or Municipal Theatre be self-supporting.

Economically, then, the question resolves itself into this: Can the nation afford to spend £1,000,000 on building a great theatre, and £50,000 a year on its upkeep? Where would the return come in? In a raising of taste and the general level of education? In the feeling of legitimate pride which such a great institution in the centre of our Empire would bring with it? As Mr. Granville-Barker wisely and wittily put it the other day: "We are a democracy, and good manners are the salvation of democracy. . . ." Is it enough? Well, I put the problem before you and the question, and I leave it at that. I am not an economist, and

that is why secretly between you and me I believe I know the right answer, though I may not live to see it given. But before that answer is effectively returned in the way I believe it will be, the conscience of the leaders of public thought in this country must be a great deal more aroused; and they in their turn must arouse the conscience of the whole country.

In Prague, before the Great War, when what is now Czecho-Slovakia was under the rule of the Austrians, the National Theatre, so-called, was of course Austrian, and gave plays only in the hated German language: though the vast majority of the populations, of necessity bi-lingual, made love and poetry in Czech only. No theatre giving plays in their own language could obtain any help from the public funds; but they determined to have one, all the same. They had little or no money to do it with, but in spite of that it was built; and there it stands, now the Official Theatre, on the banks of their wonderful river "in the beautiful city of Prague," which Thackeray sang of so charmingly: a monument of what spirit and determination can do. For it was built without the expenditure of one single penny, in the spare time of the workers, from the chief architect to the plumber's assistant; and every stick and stone presented and dedicated to the spirit of the nation that was to be by the landowners and their tenants. Is such a spirit impossible in England to-day? Can we ask those sacrifices in the cause of civilization which we did not ask in vain in the cause of the Great War? Personally I refuse to believe in the impossibility.

So much, then, for the theatre of our dreams. Let me now talk for a little while about the poor struggling attempts to keep alive the serious theatre in England to-day, and how much you may respect it and what you can do to help it. In the very short space at my disposal it is not possible for me to give you, even if it were necessary, the very briefest résumé

of the history of our English Theatre from its beginnings to the present day. It is sufficient for me to say that England in its happiest ages loved its Theatre and had a Theatre of which it might be justly proud; and that if (as we all hope) England is moving again after all her trials and tribulations into another age of happiness, she will again demand a Theatre of which she may be proud, to reflect and concentrate the picture of that happiness. After the glorious Elizabethan Age, the English Theatre dwindled, decayed and practically suffered extinction; and it is not for me to say (nor do I believe) that its punishment was not richly deserved. Right up to our own times it was largely (though of course there were exceptions to the rule) merely an amusement for the few and frivolous; and it was really not until the war came that it became again an absolutely popular institution. During the war, and the miserable and unsettled period which followed it, the people rushed to it in vast numbers helter-skelter to escape from their own thoughts, which had become in many cases almost unbearable. Unfortunately, the organization of the theatre was so defective, the wiser leaders of public thought had held themselves so aloof from it that the theatres were unable to deal in any worthy manner with the demand that was created. The theatre managers, finding that people would come and see practically any fare that they were able to provide, gave them what came easiest to hand—and believe me, so great was the strain upon them that they are not too much to be blamed for this.

Meanwhile the rents of the theatres went up by leaps and bounds, simply because the economic situation made it impossible for new theatres to be built. Now the inevitable reaction has set in, the orgy of extravagance is over; and people are beginning much more to select what plays they will and will not see, and the consequence is that the man-

agers everywhere are once more faced with an extremely difficult situation. It is really now in the hands of the public to decide what is to be the nature of the theatrical fare that is to be presented to them. If the public taste can be led in the direction of a demand for plays which contain suggestions of thought and of beauty, the managements will be forced to supply what they demand; and believe me, they would in nearly all cases be very glad to move in that direction. But the public must be taught to differentiate between beauty and mere display; they must be taught, in fact, to demand everywhere the presence of the artist in the theatre. It is no longer possible (even if it were desirable) for a manager to give you Shakespeare's plays and the great classics with all the trimmings which were demanded by the public in the times of Irving and of Tree; you must learn to appreciate and find even better the simple decorative backgrounds which were certainly in the mind of Shakespeare when originally he wrote his plays—though I do not mean to say that they need necessarily be rigidly the same in form, a mere reproduction of what one can imagine has taken place in the past, which may occasionally be interesting to the archæologically minded, but is not the way to preserve life and vitality in dramatic representations.

I wonder if, to illustrate my meaning and make it, I think, more clear than any explanations of mine could do, I might quote two passages from Shakespeare: the first from "Anthony and Cleopatra" and the second from "Henry V":

I will tell you.
The barge she sat in, like a burnished throne,
Burn'd on the water; the poop was beaten gold,
Purple the sails, and so perfumed, that
The winds were lovesick with them, the oars were silver,

Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke, and made
The water which they beat to follow faster,
As amorous of their strokes. For her own person,
It beggar'd all description; she did lie
In her pavilion—cloth-of-gold of tissue—
O'er picturing that Venus where we see
The fancy outwork nature; on each side of her
Stood pretty-dimpled boys, like smiling Cupids,
With divers-coloured fans, whose wind did seem
To glow the delicate cheeks which they did cool,
And what they undid did.
Her gentlewomen, like the Nereides,
So many mermaids, tended her i' the eyes,
And made their bends adornings; at the helm
A seeming mermaid steers; the silken tackle
Swell the touches of those flower-soft hands,
That yarely frame the office. From the barge
A strange invisible perfume hits the sense
Of the adjacent wharfs. The city cast
Her people out upon her, and Anthony
Enthron'd i' the market place, did sit alone,
Whistling to the air; which, but for vacancy,
Had gone to gaze on Cleopatra too
And made a gap in nature.

* * * * * *

O! for a Muse of fire, that would ascend
The brightest heaven of invention
A kingdom for a stage, princes to act
And monarchs to behold the swelling scene.
Then should the war-like Harry, like himself,
Assume the part of Mars; and at his heels,
Leash'd in like hounds, should famine, sword, and fire
Crouch for employment. But pardon, gentles all,

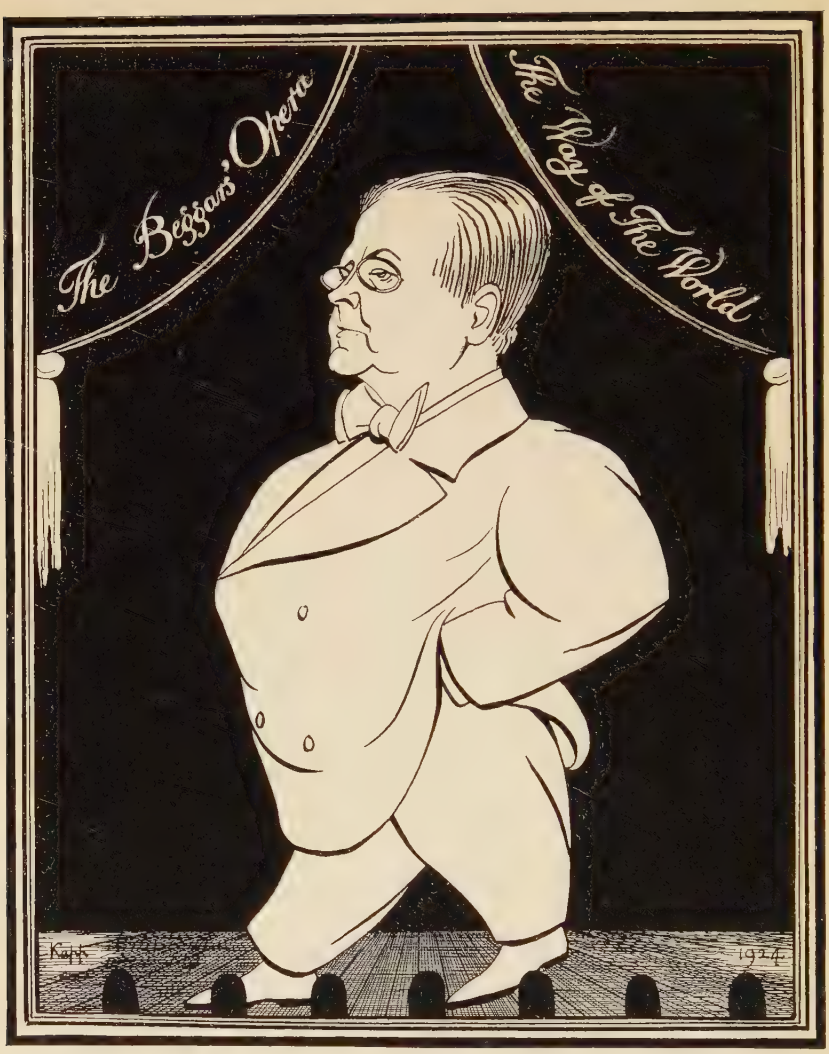
The flat unraised spirits that hath dar'd
On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth
So great an object; can this cockpit hold
The vasty fields of France ? or may we cram
Within this wooden O the very casques
That did affright the air at Agincourt ?
O, pardon ! since a crooked figure may
Attest in little place a million;
And let us, ciphers to this great accompt,
On your imaginary forces work.
Suppose within the girdle of these walls
Are now confined two mighty monarchies,
Whose high upreared and abutting fronts
The perilous narrow ocean parts asunder;
Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts:
Into a thousand parts divide one man,
And make imaginary puissance;
Think when we talk of horses that you see them
Printing their proud hoofs i' the receiving earth;
For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,
Turning the accomplishment of many years
Into an hour glass.

Yes! for "'tis *your* thoughts that now must deck our Kings," and not the adventitious aid of clumsy masses of painted canvas, which can never be anything but a hindrance and an outrage to any whose imaginations are capable of being stirred by the words of a poet.

CHAPTER ONE

The Beginnings

Making Enemies of my Readers: the general public, the critics, the actors—Are all Managers Fools?—The Nature of a Mezzo-brow—Filial Piety: my biography—I explore the Far West—The Blood-and-Flea-Pit—The Nereid Chucks Out—I accidentally Buy a Theatre—Its Prospects —My Prospects—No Money— The Money Found.



MR. NIGEL PLAYFAIR ; FROM THE CARICATURE BY KAPP

I

I HAVE known men ready to confess that they had no ear for music, no head for business, even no sense of humour; I once met a man who did not know what was going to win the Derby; but I have never yet met anyone ready to confess that he did not know a good play from a bad one—or at any rate, that he could not prophesy whether a play would be a success or a failure. I suppose that is why it is every actor's ambition to become a manager; and why he invariably considers the particular manager under whom he works to be the biggest fool on this side of the asylum door.

Indeed, there is only one thing on which actors, critics and the general public are absolutely agreed, and that is that all managers are fools.

Take the public first: Mrs. Wortley-Brown and Mrs. Brown-Wortley are discussing the theatre:

Mrs. W. B.: Oh, my dear, and have you seen " The Early Primrose ? " Isn't it too terrible.

Mrs. B. W.: Oh, yes, I should think I have! I can't think why people go to such nonsense ! Each time I was there—and I've been five times now—the house was packed. It passes my comprehension.

Or take the critics. The fundamental axiom of contemporary dramatic criticism seems to be that all plays which are acted are bad, and all plays which are not acted are good. Old critics gradually become used to the success of plays they have damned, but it does not really shake their belief in this axiom: they can always find plenty of reason for success outside the merit of the play. (And after all, the critic thinks the public are almost as great fools as the managers.)

But that would not matter so much if it were not for the other half of the axiom, if it were not that all critics, old and young alike, are addicted to the vice of *Discovery*—a very insidious vice, and one which very soon demoralizes its practitioners. Its first stages are comparatively innocent, and consist in the recommendation of obscure plays to the notice of producing societies and amateur repertory companies. But the vice soon gets hold of them, and before long they are demanding that their Discovery should be put on the commercial stage with a £10,000 production. " If only some manager would have the sense to see the commercial possibilities in this play, his fortune and his reputation would both be made ! "

It is, of course, unpleasant to be called a fool without any possibility of retort; but the expense of taking their Discovery and running it for a week to empty houses is one which few managers would be willing to incur, even for the pleasure of being able to say, " You're another ! "

The critics have a very unfair advantage: they know very well that no manager will, as *they* put it, " have the sense " to take up their Discovery, and so no one can say them nay. They risk nothing whatever by their decisions, and are thus likely to be a little more glib with them than the manager, who risks the Bankruptcy Court.

I think I see how this might be altered:

I have often wondered how many discoverers there must be in London: I should think they must run into three figures. Of course, dramatic critics are not generally rich men (if they became rich, I often feel that their disinterested passion for the theatre might inexplicably evaporate); but nevertheless, if they formed a syndicate among themselves they could surely find enough money to put on under their own management at least *one* of the " sure things " they so kindly call our attention to; and after their first production, of course, they would have more money than they would know

what to do with, and would be able to put on all their other discoveries without bombarding existing managements !

Of course I do not pretend that managers are always right; but I do think that, seeing they are mostly born and brought up behind the safety-curtain, and that their livelihood depends on it, they are more likely to be right than men whose livelihood depends on filling a certain amount of space with something a little more startling than the other fellow has written.

And then there are the actors. It is only natural with them to feel annoyed that they should be working for another man for a few paltry hundreds a week when they might be making thousands—as well as giving themselves the best parts and all the advertisement. (For the manager has not yet been born who realizes the actor's true worth, his absolute indispensability when compared to all other actors; and therefore to the actor also all managers are fools.)

Having now made inveterate enemies of everyone who is likely to read this book, having abused the public, the critic and the actor impartially, it only remains to confess that, being myself a member of the public (in other people's theatres), and an actor, I have myself in these last words exhibited all the natural vices of the critic.

But no: I must still pause to point out that those in search of the really eccentric in dramatic art are likely to be disappointed by what I have to say: that this is the story of a theatre constructed to look like a theatre, and not like a Methodist Chapel or the inside of a watch—indeed, it is decorated in the best 1880 *baroque* manner; that the plays acted in it are intelligible (and even attractive), to certain sections of the public; that the actors are men and women who actually draw salaries—not puppets, nor yet amateurs with souls to be publicly saved; in short, that though I cannot honestly claim to be a " low-brow," at least I am not a " high-brow," but what I believe is now called in America

a "mezzo-brow," an Uncompromising Mezzo-brow! And if you imagine that to be a "mezzo-brow" means that one has no positive opinions at all—that it simply consists in a Janus-like negation of extremes—I give you the lie direct, and will substantiate my challenge in a later chapter.

* * * * * *

Having now very loyally stood up for the Genus *Manager*, I suppose I ought to explain by what accident I came to be one. It is an accident that might happen to anyone, so it is just as well to be prepared.

Thank heaven, however, I am spared the necessity of writing my early autobiography, which usually figures prominently in Chapter I; and you are spared the necessity of skipping it. For little though I have done to deserve it, my biography has already been written. I found the manuscript the other day hidden in a bookshelf. Never say that filial piety is dead nowadays! For this biography was written by one of my sons; and here I intend to print it, without his permission, which I should have some difficulty in obtaining —he being Congrevian in his contempt for mere authorship! It is, though I say it who am his father, as great a treasure-house of picturesque and inaccurate information as any other biography. It discloses the fact that I have undergone a legal training; but as I never got to the bit where it tells you whether or not a "de facto" infant may bring an action for breach of copyright against his next friend, I will risk it.

LIFE OF MR. NIGEL PLAYFAIR

By Lyon Playfair

Born in the eighteenth century, he was educated at Margate, etc., then went to Harrow and Oxford. After an unsuccessful career as a barrister, he became an actor. In 1918 he bought a queer theatre out at Hammersmith and got famous as a perducer.

That is all.

This is how it came about.

It happened that in 1918 I was responsible for the production of a one-act play called "The Surrey Zoo," at a charity matinee, at the same time that I was acting in Mr. Arnold Bennett's "The Title." It certainly was an attractive time for anyone to become a manager, for it was just at the height of the theatre boom : fortunes were being made right and left; and it seemed as if any play put on anyhow was bound to succeed. The public poured into theatres simply because they *were* theatres, and seemed to have ceased to care what was offered them behind the footlights. But if it was from one point of view an appropriate moment for the embryonic manager, from another it was an extremely bad one. In the first place, the theatre boom had reacted on rents, and theatres which before the War could be had for £90 a week were now costing three or four hundred; and difficult to find at that. Moreover, it was absolutely plain that a theatre boom, just like a rubber boom, must have a reaction—that the inevitable result of the public rushing to see any play anywhere was that presently they would rush to see no play nowhere, and, like all other prices, rents would take much longer to fall than they had taken to rise.

However, I am digressing, and giving the impression that I went into management of my own freewill, as it were, instead of as a matter of accident. I was, as I have said, responsible for producing a one-act play, and for the purpose of the play certain scenery was needed. Somebody (I forget who it was) told me that there was an old blood-and-thunder theatre at Hammersmith in a state of semi-liquidation, where I could possibly hire what I wanted. So I constituted myself an expedition of exploration, and set out for the Far West.

"I have known the little Lyric, down Hammersmith

way," said a writer a few years later in the *Weekly Scotsman*, " squeezed in between common streets, in a none too salubrious marketing centre, since my school days. Before it was rebuilt into the Lyric Opera House it was the Lyric Hall, where, as a pupil, I recited at our annual entertainment, and once stepped upon the platform to receive a prize. During its reconstruction I made a daily detour homewards from school and longingly watched the daily progress. The opening night lives in my memory ! The piece was ' Donnybrook,' an Irish song and dance affair, as like unto our modern revue as makes no matter. Then came shows galore—' The Shaughraun,' with Auguste Creamer as Conn, and my first ' Hamlet,' with J. G. Johnson as the Prince, played, on the night of my visit, to precisely twelve people. Also a series of really capital pantomimes, scened and dressed at the theatre, with clever, enthusiastic principals, of whom many have since become famous."

The theatre certainly took some finding, for it was almost lost in an old-clothes market. Whelk stalls, overcoats, and the establishments of fish-and-chip vendors jostled each other right round the very door; and on the steps an aged and incredibly miserable-looking man, hat in hand, was singing the sad story of his life to a tune of three notes, with intervals presumably corrupted from some Chinese composer, and in a voice which seemed to have been generated among all the internal diseases in the medical dictionary.

I found on inquiring for the theatre that its local name was " The Blood-and-Flea-Pit."

However, I somehow made my way in ; and found, to my astonishment, the manager's office occupied by an actress I had known many years before. The whole place was in a state of the most unimaginable chaos—old pantomime dresses, bits of scenery, gelatine from the lights, old

play-bills, wigs, make-up—scattered all over the place; from which eschatological sea of debris the extremely pretty manageress rose like a Nereid, and, mounted on a property rock, with a plate of chops in her lap, was feeding with the bones a sort of covey of Pomeranians—the dolphins of this extraordinary ocean. How she had found herself goddess of this distant grove I have not the least idea. Nothing more inappropriate than her youth and beauty against this general background of squalor could be imagined—but there she was.

The theatre was not in continuous use—indeed, it was practically dismantled. Even melodrama had deserted it for happier climes. It had, indeed, had a chequered history, having been everything from a mission hall to a boxing ring. At Christmas they used to clear enough space in the rubbish to produce a pantomime, and counted on making their rent for the rest of the year out of it; otherwise, they used to let it occasionally for concerts, fights and public meetings.

Later on I was invited by the manageress to a semi-political concert held there. All the speakers were drunk, and refused to stop: the audience booed and yelled at them, and their secretaries generally had to emerge from the wings and pull them off the stage by their coat-tails. On that occasion I saw the manageress throw out a tough from the gallery bar with her own hands—an amusement which, I am told, had been growing on her for some time !

I have described the scene in the manager's office by day. By night it was used as a bedroom by a boy of fifteen, who combined the offices of day-man, hall-keeper, night-watchman, and general right-hand-man. He used to sleep there, rolled in a couple of curtains taken down from the door of the dress circle; and sometimes, I think, half the destitutes of Hammersmith were given free lodging there too. This boy subsequently disappeared, and has not since been traced;

our business manager's bicycle, by a curious coincidence, disappeared at the same time.

The wardrobe had practically become an old-clothes shop; they were selling off costumes for a few shillings apiece. One of the stage hands apparently claimed as his perquisite all broken wood, which he used to exchange with his friends outside for mugs of beer; and as he grew more thirsty the breakages among the furniture and properties generally became phenomenal !

So I explained to the manageress why I had come, and she told me I was welcome to what I wanted—if I could find it, which was certainly no easy problem. At the same time, she mentioned casually that she was selling the theatre the next day to a cinema company for something over a couple of thousand pounds. Quite mechanically I offered her £50 more, though I had neither the least idea where the money was to come from, nor what I would do with the theatre when I got it; for that a considerable amount would need to be spent on it was obvious. Somewhat to my perturbation she accepted, and gave me a fortnight in which to find the money.

Indeed I had reason to feel perturbation, for to be faced with the problem of raising several thousand pounds in a fortnight is bad enough, but the problem of running a theatre in such a state and in such a place was a worse one. I began to consult other managers in the vicinity. " Oh, yes," said one of them, " the Lyric is an excellent theatre. Its only drawback is that the play is not yet written which could run there for more than a fortnight. But it 's a splendid theatre. Of course it isn't very large, but then I should think you could charge at least a shilling for the front rows of the stalls. Oh, yes, it's an excellent theatre." All this was very cheering; indeed, the only department of the theatre which everyone agreed was lucrative was the bar; and it was kept open, apparently, whether there was a play on or not.

I climbed about the auditorium to examine things. The line of sight was certainly good—in fact, I do not know any other theatre so well constructed from this point of view; there was not a single seat without an excellent view of the stage. All round the ceiling were painted the names of the great: the grand five being Shakespeare, Sheridan, Pinero, Sims and Pettit. And the other day someone asked me who was Pettit! Well, at the Lyric, at any rate, that fallen thunderer of the barn-storm is commemorated.

The first problem was to find the money. What was to be done with the theatre when I had got it was a problem I was temporarily ready to shelve. After all, I suppose it was so unlikely that I ever *would* get it. However, I began inquiries.

Money is quite the heaviest thing on earth: at any rate, it is easily the hardest to raise. The London theatrical world at that time was flowing with it, as Canaan did with milk and honey; but none of the streams seemed willing to be diverted in my direction. I was as cut off from it as Moses on his mountain. The boom was all over the country it is true: there was hardly a manager anywhere who was not making his fortune. But it had somehow missed Hammersmith, and everyone was convinced that it would continue to miss it. In London all eyes were concentrated on the West End, where the bubble was blown to its biggest and brightest; everyone was scrambling to make vast fortunes before it should collapse, but had little attention to give to a mild speculation in a distant suburb.

Meanwhile my time was slipping away. It is extraordinary how quickly a fortnight can pass when something has to be done before the end of it, and my fortnight was indeed very nearly up when at last I struck gold. My mine was not in the usual fields of theatrical finance. Mr. A. B. Horne is one of those few men of means who take a really intelligent

interest in the theatre. On some occasions he had financed theatrical undertakings to good purpose (but of course as an amateur). I told him my predicament at lunch one day, and he very nobly allowed himself to be persuaded to buy the theatre for me and hold it until I could make proper arrangements for taking it over. I rushed him off to a solicitor that afternoon, and we bought the theatre on the spot.

CHAPTER TWO

" Make-Believe "

24th December 1918—25th January 1919

Arnold Bennett: a psychological appreciation—Me and Mathematics—Him and Mathematics—Our Syndicate Launched—The Heavenly Nest-Egg—The Eager Bill Inspector—My Great Wealth—Mr. Milne and " Make-Believe "—Rehearsing in a Bubby-Hutch—The Cast—The Finding of Miss H***—Synthetic Scenery: " Something Christmassy "—The Soul of a Musician—Dusky Maidens and Dr. Jaeger—The Children's Saturnalia—A Lesson in Geography.

II

FOR an actor to find himself possessed of a theatre "is a very strange sensation—very strange indeed," as the Welshman said about being dead;* and for the rest of the day it seemed likely to be a sensation and nothing more. I don't know what would have happened, but for the enthusiasm of a visitor to my dressing-room that evening. That visitor was Arnold Bennett, in whose play, "The Title," I was then acting. Partly by way of making conversation (for Bennett has an embarrassing habit of neglecting to pull his weight in matters of chatter), partly because I naturally found it a subject difficult to keep quiet about, I told him that I had just bought a theatre—told him, I am afraid, in a consciously off-hand manner, as if I made a habit of collecting them. He not unnaturally asked me why, and what I intended to do with it—though, of course, expressing no surprise: Bennett would not allow you to think he had not anticipated as much, if you informed him you had bought Selfridge's or sold your only winter overcoat. I told him that for the present I didn't know: I supposed I should have to let it. But Bennett would have none of such poltroonery. Bennett, as well as being an author, is a business man: one might almost say that if writing is his business, business is his art. He takes an unholy delight in figures and percentages and profit-and-losses. That shows what calibre of man he is: other men wear themselves to death by business: to him it is a tonic and a recreation, he is akin to the fire-eaters and sword-swallowers one sees at country fairs, and the men who chew wine-glasses. And well it was for me that I had him by my side. Sometimes, indeed, when I have handed to him, presiding at

* In "A Comedy of Good and Evil."

my Board, estimates which a dozen head-aching hours had scarcely sufficed for me to compose, the look of disdain which comes over his face, the dagger-like poise of his pencil, sharpened to a nicety, remind me fearfully of the report of my mathematical master at Harrow: "Playfair's lack of appreciation of the simplest forms of mathematics is absolutely incredible."

Here was a chance of combining business with pleasure, literature with figures. "I will get you the money," he promised: and having promised, did. There and then the outlines of a future Syndicate were drawn out by him. He threw thousands into the air, extracted their cube roots and caught them as they fell. And, fixing me with his sternest expression, repeatedly asked me if I understood; and other even more intricate questions. As is my wont on these occasions, I shook out a "no" and a "yes" alternately and at great speed—hoping that the sequence of the questions would more often than not catch, as it sped, the right and expected reply. The method seemed at the time, and has seemed since, reasonably successful; though I often fancy myself to observe lurking in the corner of the Chairman's eye something very like SUSPICION.

Such are the agonies of Board Meetings—or at least the first and financial half before the tea comes in. . . . Luckily they only occur once a week.

If His Majesty's Ministry of Information never served any other useful purpose, it can at least claim to have been the foster parent of the Lyric Theatre. Bennett, I think, had by that time just finished his distinguished services in it, and there he had met several very rich colleagues whom now he called together, and to whom he delivered a short and exceedingly downright lecture on the duties that are bound up with the possession of great wealth. It was a favourite subject of his, and one on which he spoke with conviction and incision; and before a week was out several of them had

parted with a tiny fraction of their wealth. Bennett told them in good, round terms that the chances of their ever seeing it back again were exceedingly remote (it was, I suppose, to be laid up for them in heaven—a kind of nest-egg for the next life), but at the same time they would have the consolation of seeing their money lost on a formal and purely business basis, with a Board of Directors and all the other usual concomitants of the losing of money.

Just what is the theological question involved by the financial success of the Theatre I don't quite know. Is the heavenly nest-egg forfeited when earthly dividends are declared? These great men gave their money on the bona-fide understanding that it should be lost for them: have we been guilty of a breach of trust?—There is a story of a man who, intending to put sixpence in the collection, put a sovereign. After the service he discovered his mistake, went to the vestry and asked for it back. This was very firmly refused. He sighed. "Well, at least I shall have the credit of that sovereign in heaven," he replied. "Oh no, you won't!" said the clergyman, "you only *meant* to put sixpence in, and sixpence is all the credit you will get."—Turn that story inside out and the present situation is arrived at. But to their comfort be it spoken "The end is not yet."

Don't imagine that this heavenly nest-egg was a very large one. The Lyric, Hammersmith, under its new regime, was launched on a total capital which would scarcely serve to keep a musical comedy at a West End theatre running for a week. Bennett became chairman of the syndicate (and still, I am happy to say, occupies the chair); I was made managing director and producer, while as co-director was elected Mr. Alistair Tayler, whose combination of enthusiasm with a talent for figures is hardly excelled even by that of Bennett.

I think the Goddess of Chance must have rather let her-

self go over that dressing-room of mine at the Royalty, for not only was the syndicate first launched in it, but humbler aspects of the theatre's activities took their inception there. I found that my dresser was a man who had come down in the world: in his palmy days he had been a bill inspector. A bill inspector is an official, in the service of the theatre, who generally supervises the hoardings and sees that all is in order. How he had lost his job I don't know, or sunk to such terrible depths as being a dresser at the Royalty; but the poor man was itching to make a new start, and now seemed his chance. He asked to be taken on as bill inspector for the new theatre, and so he was. He was full of zeal: he wanted to begin inspecting bills at once. I had to explain to him that one cannot inspect bills till they are posted, and one cannot post bills till one has some idea of what play one is going to produce, and when and who will act in it. But our friend had a soul above these petty details, and presently he had an idea.

" Now, sir, if you was to 'ave a few sheets printed saying ' The Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, will shortly re-open,' and then if I was to 'ave 'em put up in some of the publics round Soho—a gentleman might be taking his young lady for a walk one evening and feeling a bit thirsty like, he'd turn in to 'ave one, and then he'd see the double crown: ' 'Ullo,' he'd say, ' '*Ullo-o-o!* They're re-openin' the Lyric, Hammersmith ! ' "

Who says that real originality in advertising is confined to America ?

The theatre, the money, the genius for advertising; now all we needed was a play—a minor consideration, as every manager knows, but a necessary one, without which very few theatres can be successfully conducted for long. Although, indeed, nobody who wants to make money out of a theatre really does so by providing the plays himself—he should

always let it to somebody else, who in his turn lets it again. A wonderful pastime it has proved to many people; but alas! I was not born with an aptitude for keeping myself amused and interested just by signing leases.

Otherwise, I might (who knows?) be a rich man now. I have, of course, that reputation—alas! singularly undeserved.

Still, I like it; and when my friends congratulate me on having made another fortune I hope I shall always bow politely—praying they may take for a frill what is in reality a fray.

This is a digression, however, and out of my part.

I think I have mentioned that the Lyric (Old Style) had lately only been opened for strictly theatrical purposes with a pantomime at Christmas. Now Christmas was getting near, and it was quite obvious that tradition and good will, even of so slender a nature, should not be wasted. A Christmas play for children must be our first venture. It happened that some time before I had written, in collaboration with a friend, a children's play: it consisted of episodes from nursery stories, strung together on a framework. I wrote the framework, my friend the episodes. Nothing was done with it, and my friend presently extracted the episodes and made a separate play of them. I was left with the string, without the parcel. So I gathered together the string and took it to my friend, Mr. A. A. Milne. Mr. Milne was already becoming known as a playwright, as well as one of the most delightful of *Punch* writers (I had myself played in one of his best plays, "Wurzel-Flummery"); and it was at his feet I laid my sorry remains. What I said was, in short, "We will write a children's play in collaboration. Here is the string which was round the original parcel; all you have to do is to build up another parcel inside this string." This Mr. Milne undertook to do; but Christmas parcels are inclined to bulge in

unexpected places, and he soon found that this one quite refused to fit the tangle with which I had provided him. And once more I was left with the string on my hands. Mr. Milne wrote " Make-Believe," and had the effrontery (and I must say, the good sense) to write it all himself.

Time was short, and " Make-Believe " went into rehearsal at once. There was barely time to sweep the Theatre —certainly no time to clear it; and the old Army gag of— *Enter Fairy Queen, slips on the butter-slide, trips over the hearth-rug, falls down the trap-door, exit Fairy Queen*—became a daily occurrence. Dusky maidens and curates, pirates and governesses, doctors and cannibals, scrambled about on a stage cluttered up with broken flies and broken furniture, and broken properties of every description; and they had to take their positions, not where the producer told them but where there was room.

Meanwhile, of course, the Augean task of clearing the stage went on, and by the first night we actually had an empty stage for the performance. But I must confess that a great many of the earlier rehearsals took place, not on the stage at all but in the bar. I remember a dress parade Milne and I held there of the " dusky maidens," which must have looked like any Renaissance picture of " Silenus and Bacchus with Maenads."

Among those dusky maidens, by the way, was no less a person than Betty Chester, and I think we can claim to have begun our reputation-making early. Hermione Baddeley, then of course still a child, was also in the cast; and to have introduced to the theatrical world of London Leslie Banks, Herbert Marshall, Hermione Baddeley, Betty Chester, and John Barclay (now a famous singer in America), and provided a charming wife for Mr. Albert Rutherston, as we did in our first production, was not a slight achievement!

But quite as intriguing to me as the discovery of these

dawning stars was the discovery of another lady much too modest to wish to see her name in print. For that I must go back several years, to when, in my touring days, I had once found myself with an evening off wandering about Manchester, and spent it aimlessly in going to a third-rate touring revue ; indeed, " revue " was rather a dignified name for it, and I confess I was bored to tears. I could not even extract from it the pleasure of a little supercilious laughter: bad melodrama makes one laugh, bad jokes can only make one weep.

But suddenly Miss H—— (let me, Lamblike, call her) appeared, and executed a break-down with extraordinary skill—no, " extraordinary skill " is a weak phrase, it was saltatory inspiration. I have always had a weakness for break-downs, and I took a note of her name for future reference.

Now, as we were producing " Make-Believe," it seemed an admirable opportunity, and I wrote to her to ask her if she would come and do her celebrated break-down for *us*. I got no answer, and presently forgot all about it. On the night of the dress-rehearsal, however, she turned up at the stage-door and told me that as she was out of a job at the moment she had come along to see if there was anything doing. She was very off-hand about it, and gave me to understand that, as ladies of another profession put it, she was only coming to oblige; moreover, she said that she would not do it unless it was made, from the financial point of view, very well worth her while. Well, it is always a difficult matter to fit in an entirely new turn on the night of the dress-rehearsal, and we certainly were not in a position to pay vast salaries. I explained this to her: she was quite unaccommodating, and quite outspoken in her conviction that she did not care whether she came or not. " I won't do it," she said, " for one *penny* under five pounds a week ! " I confess that somewhat eased my mind: I thought she was going to

ask fifty! So I told her that I hoped to be able to persuade my fellow directors to make a special effort to pay this vast salary, and took her on as an extra Cassowary—it being a zoological fact that a Cassowary is always liable to a break-down sooner or later.

Her turn was an immense success, as I was sure it would be; but I never knew a person whose head was less turned. She never spoke to anyone else in the cast, but when off the stage used to sit in a corner tatting. Her mother came with her every night, and sat in the wings, as silent as herself, and tatting too. I am quite certain she had not the least idea what the rest of the play was about.

When her contract terminated she returned, I believe, to provincial revue. I have never seen her or heard of her since, alas !

Although I cannot claim to have collaborated with Mr. Milne in his play, I did write a prologue for it, which took the form of a dialogue between Scissors and Paste—Miss Hermione Baddeley and her sister, Angela, still " with me," as they say at the Bar, and by licence of the Law and the Clergy entitled to live with my Stage Manager. The play itself is a delightful children's extravaganza; and the sole reason, I think, why it has not been revived anywhere else in London (it was revived a few years afterwards at the Liverpool Repertory Theatre, then under my management) is that, having been originally designed to fit my fragments, it is inclined to be a bit disconnected. But that did not worry the children: it makes no difference to children whether one skips from the nursery floor to a desert island, and if the curate is pursuing the governess one moment and is himself pursued—hat and coat and hymn-book too—by a Cassowary in the next. Moreover, it is, from the grown-ups' point of view, an absolutely immoral play; and it is only children, I think, who really appreciate immorality in this sad world !

Freud, I suppose, would call it "wish-fulfilment," which is a milder name for the same thing. For the theme of the play is the translation of the children by the blessed machinery of make-believe from nursery servitude to desert-island despotism, with cannibals and pirates and dusky maidens as their humble servitors, and the terrific punishments they mete out to their grown-up tormentors. And what a grand pirate John Barclay made! Hat and boots, he was over seven feet high, and stepped over a bed without having to alter his stride!

The scenery was a wonderful hotch-potch. I noticed the other day, in reading through the press cuttings, that one critic refers to it as Futurist, while another says that it was in the best tradition of fairy-book illustration: and indeed they were both right. The job was given in the first place to a regular scene-painter of immense age, who did a desert island with real waves frozen stiff at their curliest moment, and other things which, if not perhaps in the best fairy-book tradition, were at any rate in the tradition of the theatre. On to this were super-imposed several odd bits of cloth by Lovat Fraser; and then there turned up at one of the rehearsals one day Mr. Hugh Gee—yet another Miss Baddeley's husband, and until recently a partner in the "Red Knight Productions"—and also set to work to do designs. And we mixed the whole thing with a spoon, and served it with applause.

The music was written by a clever but excitable French gentleman: the apt (but intentionally far from soulful) lyrics by Mr. Burton ("Touchstone" and "C. E. B." of the *Daily Mail*); and each time the former appeared with one of them to be set he would assure me with tears in his eyes that symphonies in the manner of Beethoven were really his line. Consider that the play and music had to be written, the show cast, rehearsed, and dressed all within the space

of three weeks; then you will realize how difficult it was to keep to (or even lay down) a consistent policy. Things reached a climax when the nice old gentleman who was our principal scene-painter asked me what sort of thing I wanted for the last scene, in which occurred the usual wind-up and final revelry of all the characters, their enmities forgotten in their unanimous desire to get off the final chorus and go home. Exhausted, I could only murmur, " Oh, anything Christmassy." So he sat up all night and produced, to my horror, a dark blue scene with gold stars and a back cloth with a vivid picture of Christ being presented with gifts by the Magi, life size ! Needless to say, the Revel took place eventually in plain, *very* plain, blue !

As regards the costumes, however, I was luckily able to start on the path of righteousness. Strictly, of course, the scenery and dresses in any one production should be carried out by one and the same person, and in every other production which I have done since I have always insisted upon this. In " Make-Believe " it was not possible for the reasons that I have given above; but in Miss Polly Hill-Clark I found a brilliant young artist who undertook not only to design all the dresses but, with the assistance of her friends, whom she set to work painting, sketching, and stencilling, to carry them out in an incredibly short time. And even not considering this, and even with the often totally unsuitable backgrounds which were their settings, she achieved a very remarkable effect.

Miss Hill-Clark married and went to live in Wales or some other remote part of the kingdom, but I am glad to pay this little tribute to her enthusiasm and skill—and " I learned about dresses from her." Of course, being Chelsea to the core (by some critics " to be Chelsea " is used as a term of reproach, I don't quite know why), she had no

patience with anybody subject to the Victorian prejudice in favour of being thoroughly clad; and I remember well an embarrassing moment when four indignant "extra" ladies walked into my office, certainly not over-dressed, and asked me if I really intended them to dance on the stage twice daily in a cold winter just like that.

In those early days we possessed no such luxury as a heating system, and even our bravest elocutionists found their speeches interrupted by the chattering of their own teeth—so for once in a way I *did* interfere on behalf of the complainers, and urged on Miss Hill-Clark the active co-operation of Dr. Jaeger in her designs.

We had, of course, an amazingly mixed audience. The children of the neighbourhood, who were used to coming there for Christmas, filled the gallery, and the children of the West End filled the stalls. It is a difficult matter to please grown-ups of all classes, but with children it is easier, and I don't really know which enjoyed it most—the stalls or the gallery. I think our first gallery audience for the Boxing Day afternoon was one of the most remarkable I have ever seen. I could not believe that the cubic space provided could contain so many children, and the cumulative effect of their laughter and chatter was amazing. Boxing Day afternoon was obviously their annual Saturnalia, and I have often felt a little ashamed since that I have provided on other Boxing Days nothing so suitable for the festival.

It was a little pathetic a year afterwards to see them trying their best to enjoy "Abraham Lincoln" in exactly the same way—a year later still Mrs. Peachum, of "The Beggar's Opera," may have given them a pale ghost of the true "Dame" of their dreams; but I fear the march of Intellectual Progress at Hammersmith has somewhat eclipsed their stock of harmless pleasure, for which I do make them my heartfelt and sincere apologies. After all they are all seven

years older and wiser now, and prepared perhaps to relish what is in store for them.

At any rate, there could be no doubt about success. The thing paid its way, or very nearly, even when our vigilant chairman and the auditors had written down, and written off, and counterbalanced, and done everything they could to make what—to the plain unmathematical brain—looked like a profit, become a loss; and at the end of it there was not, as there well might have been, any necessity for the new syndicate to go into immediate liquidation.

We had saved our lives by strict adherence to tradition—no mean achievement for an innovator! And I had made for myself one or two extremely valuable discoveries—psychological and geographical. I discovered that, once you know the clue to the little maze that immediately surrounds it, the Lyric, Hammersmith, is actually nearer to the vast residential neighbourhoods of Kensington and Chelsea, to say nothing of Chiswick and Bayswater, than is Leicester Square; and, what is more important still, when the traffic on the tubes and buses is packed to suffocation going east, going westward it is tempered to the Claustrophobic Lamb, as it were. Papa, mamma and the children go to the Lyric, Shaftesbury Avenue, with trodden corns and hanging to a strap; to the Lyric, Hammersmith, they proceed with, more than likely, a carriage to themselves—at most with a laughing party bound for the Palais de Danse.

Also that, provided the fare will satisfy them, there is something to the tax-ridden parent in being asked to part with four five-and-ninepences instead of four twelve-and-sixpences—let alone the temptation of the supper places afterwards avoided !

The family visit to Hammersmith had already in " Make-Believe " begun to be an institution : it was now my duty to frame a policy to keep that institution in happy being.

CHAPTER THREE

"The Younger Generation" and "La Serva Padrona"

29th January 1919—15th February 1919

"Abraham Lincoln"

19th February 1919—21st February 1920

Were we a Repertory Theatre?—Theatres and Children Compared—Lovat Fraser Makes His Bow—I see "Abraham Lincoln"—A Digression: Poets and Pigs Compared—The Advantages of being Dead—A Dissertation on the War Spirit—"Lincoln" Begins Badly—Author turns Actor—"Which of these Blokes . . .?"—Enter the King and Queen—Success at Last.

III

WE had made a successful beginning: the next problem was how to go on. After all, Christmas comes only once in the year, and, charming as Milne's pantomime might be, it would hardly do for the dog days. We were indeed hard put to it for the choice of our next play. Moreover, I had fully accepted all that the other Hammersmith managers had told me about the theatre; in my wildest dreams at that time I never expected to be able to run any play for more than six weeks there. I had not any particular belief in the repertory system for its own sake, but I thought that we were forced by circumstances into a position somewhat analogous to that of a repertory theatre. "When does a repertory theatre cease to be a repertory theatre?" said the late Sir Herbert Tree, maker of epigrams. "When it's a success!"

And speaking of Tree and epigrams, though it has nothing to do with the matter under discussion, I can't resist recording one that came within my own hearing and has not I think appeared in print. A certain leading lady would refer to her children as "child*ren*." "Never say child*ren*," said Tree, "child*ren* is merely the illegitimate plural of cheeild!"

I suppose I must plead guilty to having expected that the Lyric would be a repertory theatre; but I repeat that I never regarded this as my aim and object—I only accepted the position which I imagined was inevitable. Afterwards, of course, when we began to have successes, the critics cried out on us for being tempted by Mammon to renounce our pledges. That is unfair: we never pledged ourselves not to have successes, though some of us may quite possibly have confessed that we did not expect to have any! However, at

this time, at any rate, I thought I should have to find a new play every six weeks.

Theatres are rather like children: all the germs of their future personality lie latent in them, waiting to be developed, but until they are at least a year or two old it is not easy to see just what their character is going to be. One has to feel about and make experiments. That is the reason, really, why our next bill was mixed of two such unlikely ingredients to find together as Pergolesi's operetta, "La Serva Padrona," and Stanley Houghton's "The Younger Generation." Both were experiments—a tentative groping along two different lines which might afterwards be extended. As a matter of fact, the most obvious line for a so-called repertory theatre to take was what one might call the "Younger Generation" line. We hardly knew ourselves then that the line which we should ultimately follow would be the line of "La Serva Padrona."

"The Younger Generation" was a very good example of the kind of play which is expected of a repertory theatre, or was expected then. Stanley Houghton was barely past the zenith of his intellectual fashion (how old that makes one feel !), and the Manchester School was still the centre of English high-brow dramatics; and though the play was not so good as "Hindle Wakes," it was still a work of considerable merit. It had an amusing plot, dialogue and action to please the ordinary theatre-goer, and, at the same time, a certain intellectual distinction to placate the fastidious. But Houghton, as I have said, was just—though only just—past the zenith of his fashion, and that was where the danger lay so far as the criticis were concerned; for among the critics there is a great race to be the first to cry "*demodé*." And indeed, so far as I remember, there was a tie for the prize in this case: *Truth* referred to the twentieth-century comedy and the eighteenth-century operetta as "two genuine

antiques," while Mr. W. J. Turner summed up the former as having "no intellectual interest to anybody but some future anthropologist."

As a matter of fact, I consider our production of "La Serva Padrona" (the last half of the programme) was of considerably more importance, as well as being, in point of fact, more risky. First and foremost, it was the first production the complete setting of which was put in the hands of Lovat Fraser. It is true he had saved the situation with "Make-Believe" by appearing on the night of the dress-rehearsal with his arms full of curtains and his mouth full of tin-tacks; but it was little more than saving the situation. In "La Serva Padrona" we were able to give him a free hand, and for the first time that extraordinary simplicity, combined with what our grandfathers called *elegance*, for which he became famous, appeared on the English stage. This simplicity went, as it should, all through the production, and was not confined to the setting. As *The Times* said: "A chair, a cushion, two doors, a pianoforte, a string quartet and an efficient conductor, two people with good voices, and a mute who is content to suffer buffets unmurmuring—and there you have 'La Serva Padrona.'" The translation was by Mrs. Lovat Fraser (Grace Crauford), who played in it.

But it was not only in questions of production that our experimentalizing lay. At that time the eighteenth century was about as much out of fashion as it well could be: purity of harmony could set on edge the teeth of the musical critic in a way no cartwheel could. In literature we were all romantics, in the seventeenth- and early nineteenth-century manner, or else realists (which generally, in Drama, means romanticists turned sentimental or sadist); and it was the thing to regard the eighteenth century as a temporary chrysaliding of civilization—an attack of frost-bite from which

mankind did not recover till the genial rays of 1800 Romanticism.

Of course this was very much a shot in the dark. I don't pretend to have been able to prophesy at that time the vogue for the eighteenth century that was coming in a year or two, or to have foreseen in the grudging praise of a few of the critics for this little advance guard the four years' run of "The Beggar's Opera." "La Serva Padrona" certainly did not take with the public, or with most of the newspapers either; the former quite decidedly preferred "The Younger Generation." It was a shot in the dark, and it was some time before we discovered where the arrow had struck. For some time we still thought that our future lay in the straight drama of the "Younger Generation" type. But "La Serva Padrona" certainly implanted in me a firm intention some time to try more eighteenth-century stuff, even if it did not implant in the public any great desire to see it. It also made me absolutely decided that the old methods of production with a hack scene-painter must go by the board—that it was as necessary for a theatre to have its sets designed by an artist of genius as to have its plays written by a good writer. And in Lovat Fraser we all recognized that we had found that artist. It was no small indication of his power that, whereas inferior men, in order to produce their effects, needed to spend vast sums (twice or three times those spent on the ordinary hack methods), Lovat Fraser got his effects actually by *not* spending money, and designed scenery which was not only very much better than the conventional stuff—it was mechanically ten times as efficient, and financially at least several times as cheap.

From our own point of view, the experiment was extremely informative; but from the box-office point of view I must confess it was not so successful. We were badly handicapped by a big strike in the middle of the run, which very nearly

SERPINA : DESIGN BY CLAUD LOVAT FRASER FOR "LA SERVA PADRONA"

foundered our craft altogether; and by the time we took the bill off we certainly had not made our fortunes. In truth, we were financially in a pretty dicky condition. It was essential that the risk, in the case of our next production, should be as small as possible.

Once more we were at a loss for a play—and certainly had no knowledge that we were on the eve of our first big success. As it happened, someone had shown me a copy of John Drinkwater's "Abraham Lincoln." If at that time you had told any manager that his only hope of a sound financial future lay in a prose historical play with verse interludes by a Georgian poet, he would have considered himself justified in being very rude to you. But so it was. I read the play, and was very much interested by it: it was obviously work of great merit. But all the same, it seemed to me that there were nine chances to one against its ever attaining any degree of popularity, or of paying its way even. But I heard that it was being produced by the Birmingham Repertory Company under Mr. Barry Jackson's able and philanthropic direction; and there were certain considerations, which I hope to explain later, which made me anxious to ascertain what effect it had on an audience.

I went off to Birmingham to see it, and (in a certain sense more important than seeing the play itself) to see an audience faced with it. I was very unlucky: I had an uncomfortable journey, my train was late and I got no dinner—which would be enough to set any man against any play. I did not arrive, as a matter of fact, at the theatre till the last act; but I saw what I came to see—what I sub-consciously expected to see—a house plainly very deeply moved and expressing its enthusiasm in a most certain manner. And before I left the theatre I made an offer to the Birmingham Repertory Company, which they accepted, of coming to the Lyric on sharing terms for a trial run.

I still realized that the risk I was taking was very considerable, for one does not need more than a superficial acquaintance with the theatre to discover that one's own likes and dislikes by no means pre-suppose identical likes and dislikes on the part of the public: I might have thought " Abraham Lincoln " the greatest play ever written, and yet have hesitated to risk our small and precarious fortunes on it. But there was a quality in this play which seemed to promise a possibility that it would do this, and it was on that quality I gambled.

The theme of Mr. Drinkwater's play was historical, but the sentiments (the moral, I might almost say) was, whether historical or not, modern. The play hit exactly the right moment: three months earlier or later the gamble would have been desperate. Now I must digress once more, this time upon the war spirit.

That spirit passed through two phases: the first founded on the Old Testament, the second on the New: the first engendered by the fierceness of the struggle, the second by the reaction of victory: the first the rigid division of the world into black and white, Germans and English, evil and good, with the God of Battles an undoubted partisan—the second a kind of corollary and reaction against this, a sudden feeling that all this certainty, this *hate* (for call it righteous anger if you like, hate by any other name still smells as foul) was a little out of date. And in the reaction people were inwardly ready, even if outwardly they hardly dared yet to say so, to decry the very mental attitude they extolled a year before. By a delightful piece of quibbling, it was decided to be no longer the thing to hate one's enemies, only to hate war, and so to punish one's enemies for making war—which came to much the same in the end ! Of course I don't for a moment say that the second attitude was not a great improvement on the first; but it must be remembered that it is fairly

easy for a conqueror to be magnanimous, and no great virtue: it is magnanimity when defeated which is the true Christian spirit—indeed, if anything can be more intolerable to the conquered than complete annihilation I think it is a magnanimous conqueror.

However, heaven forbid that I should set up as a censor of morals. I only want to point out why, it seems to me, "Abraham Lincoln" was so well received by people at large. It was a play of noble sentiments—sentiments, that is to say, which were just coming into fashion; and there is nothing for which the plain man better likes a poet than for saying what he was beginning to think himself. All Lincoln's speeches, his attitude towards reprisals, towards the condemned sentry—all these things contained ideas at which the general public was beginning to arrive for itself; and reflected, and indeed encouraged, the attitude which people were beginning to take up towards the Treaty of Versailles. They saw in the play an allegory of themselves and their own times—that is to say, they saw themselves in Abraham Lincoln, and in the narrowminded and vindictive people round him they saw their friends—forgetting that those very friends were probably feeling the dawn of the new spirit just as much as themselves, but, like themselves, hesitated to give it public expression.

However, to start analysing the success would have been very premature during the first few weeks of the run, for it was at its inception an undoubted failure. Some of the papers gave it good reviews, for, incredible as it may seem, poets were "news" in the journalistic sense in those days; some hailed it as a great play, but one did not feel at first that they were really convinced by their own words, but awed more by what they imagined they *ought* to think. Many were just lukewarm: one went so far as to call it "an amalgamation of bad history, worse drama, and intellectual snobbery."

Further, whatever the critics might say, for some time the public would not come at all. The first matinee was played to a sum lower than that taken for any other performance at the theatre—£17. The general receipts, too, were so low as to be well below the margin set in our agreement, and it was touch-and-go whether we confessed defeat and took the play off or not.

And yet I had already seen with my own eyes a theatre filled with enthusiasts. Could it be that the only intelligent people in the country were all gathered in Birmingham ? I confess I began to have my doubts. But at length, almost imperceptibly at first, but soon quite noticeably, the receipts began to pull up. People who had been to see it found themselves unexpectedly moved, and even quite pleasurably edified. They began to recommend it to their friends, which is ultimately the only recommendation which ever fills a theatre—partly through quite genuine enjoyment of the play, partly (I suspect) to find out if their friends were as capable of appreciating great art as themselves, and to see whether it would convert them from the narrow-mindedness of their ways.

The Press began to talk: Mr. Rea's performance of Lincoln could not fail presently to attract notice, by the extraordinary body of personality he gave to it. Also, of course, the more weighty and considered reviews are generally the later ones, and they began to improve. The proportion of cuttings which hailed it as a great play increased, and, what is more, they sounded more convinced and convincing. Naturally also, the more intelligent reviewers recognized the contemporary appeal of it: as one of them quaintly put it, " History repeats itself, especially beforehand." Almost before we realized what was happening, our failure began to show itself an established success. There was that in the scene of the pardoning of the soldier and the surrender of

Lee which could not fail sooner or later to move the public at such a time. And Mr. Rea's presentation of the figure of Lincoln, with its loneliness, its breadth and uncompromising rectitude, could not possibly fail to impress itself on them either: what all men felt at that time was that they wanted a Lincoln—not men to juggle with reparations and frontiers. I believe they partly came to the theatre for that feeling of political confidence which they could not get outside it; to that I partly attribute the success of another play about that time, "The Lost Leader," in which Parnell comes to life again in a distracted Ireland. It was the voice of Rachel crying for a Strong Man.

But, curiously enough, our first full house was not for a performance given by Mr. Rea at all. He was called away on urgent private business, and Mr. Drinkwater was not at all pleased with the powers of his understudy. Mr. Drinkwater decided that on this occasion he would play the part himself! We bound him a copy of the script in old calf, in order that Lincoln's sudden meditative habits might not arouse suspicion; and at that performance at least Lincoln showed himself a voracious reader! The news (I will not say just how) reached the evening Press; and a few hours before the curtain went up most of the evening papers had a column on the surprising news of an author suddenly playing his own lead for one night only. I don't wish in any way to detract from Mr. Drinkwater's performance, but it certainly seems odd that it was a performance *not* given by Mr. Rea which really laid the foundation-stone of Mr. Rea's success in the part; and that the public, who remained unmoved by accounts of Mr. Rea's fine acting, rushed to see a performance which—for all they knew—might have been incredibly bad, though indeed it was very far from that from all reports, for I did not enjoy the advantage of seeing it myself.

So we got our first full house with " Abraham Lincoln," and many followed it. And so " Abraham Lincoln " happily coincided with the contemporary public conscience, and the public conscience began to pay for the collaboration in a most gratifying way, both to the author and the theatre. And the author became convinced that the public are not nearly such fools as is generally made out; and the public became convinced that really great work cannot go unrecognized; and the management sat down convinced that they had had the biggest stroke of luck they ever had had, or were likely to have.

This was the first time that the West End really found its way to the Farthest West. Coming out of the theatre at night, I remember on one occasion seeing a party of ladies in evening dress tasting roast potatoes at the stall round the corner with an unholy glee: they had not only come to see the play, but to see life as well !

If the Lyric was difficult to get to—off the beaten track—it was at least something of an adventure; and, of course, some adventurers always fall by the wayside. They were running " The Private Secretary " at the King's Theatre opposite at this time; and at the end of the first scene one night a puzzled voice was heard to inquire, " Well, and which of these blokes *is* Abraham Lincoln ? " However, I expect he enjoyed himself all right.

Then we were informed that the King and Queen wished to be present. The Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, is an excellent theatre, as I have said once or twice, but it was not designed—indeed, never expected—to receive Royalty; there was no Royal Box. However, a management which had built the scenery for " Make-Believe " out of bits of cloth and old canvas a few hours before the first night, was not likely to be daunted. We built a Royal Box on the spot, by fencing off a bit of the pit and stalls: access to it was pro-

vided by one of the ordinary pit exits, which we closed for the occasion. Truly the old "Blood-and-Flea-Pit" was looking up in the world! But we were all a little nervous as to whether these make-shift arrangements would go smoothly. Fortunately they did.

Naturally the news was soon all over Hammersmith, and the way to the theatre, on all occasions tortuous and crowded with market-stalls—was almost impassable with cheering crowds when their Majesties arrived. Local patriotism, as well as loyalty, made them cheer; for now indeed they felt the horn of Hammersmith was exalted, when the King and Queen themselves visited its theatre! *Question:* What had Piccadilly now to crow over Hammersmith Broadway for? *Answer:* Why, nothing. All, as I have said, went smoothly: the King was very graciously pleased with the play and the performance, and showed considerable knowledge of, as well as interest in, the theatre; and the Queen endorsed all he said—indeed, I think Her Majesty was surprised by finding anything of merit outside the West End into warmer praise than we deserved.

By this time the public verdict of approval was almost universal. Lord Charnwood, Lincoln's biographer, praised the play in no measured terms; and those critics who had been supercilious about the first production were, many of them, now among the loudest in the play's praise. Soon to have seen "Abraham Lincoln" came to be regarded not only an adventure but as a moral duty, and even a social necessity as well; and by the time London had fulfilled this duty the play had run for a full year—an achievement we had never dared to dream of even in our most optimistic moments.

At the same time I must not exaggerate. "Abraham Lincoln" did not make a fortune either for the theatre or its author, it merely laid the foundations for both. It played through the year's run to a consistent profit it is true, but a

very modest profit. It remained for " The Beggar's Opera " to provide, temporarily at any rate, what may be justly called a fortune for the theatre; and for the play's performances in America to bring a real reward for its author. " Abraham Lincoln," a play written by an Englishman about its national hero, took America at once by storm. I am not in the secrets of John Drinkwater's pass-book, and it may be a gross libel upon him to say that through " Abraham Lincoln " there was once to his credit a balance of some fifty thousand pounds; but I do know that its run and profits in New York were phenomenal, and that for several years touring companies visited every small town in the States. Its receipts were no doubt pallid in comparison with those of " Abie's Irish Rose " (a play whose merits the English public has not yet had an opportunity of passing judgment upon;) but this only goes to prove that there is an endless variety of tastes to be satisfied in that country as well as in our own.

" Abraham Lincoln " was revived later in London, both at the Lyceum and Scala theatres, but not with any great success. This is no reflection, I think, upon its merits. It was a play of contemporary interest, and intended so to be. The particular attitude of mind which helped so much to appreciation of it has passed, at any rate for the moment.

But I think it has placed its author in an unrivalled position as an interpreter of the spirit of the English people, and I feel quite certain that when the opportunity arises Drinkwater will write another fine and sparkling drama, and I only hope that I may have the happy chance of being its producer.

Whether " Robert Burns," which is in my possession and will be given by me after this book is published, will prove to be that play it would be rash for me to prophesy. I will only go as far as to say that I cherish a certain conviction with regard to it.

CHAPTER FOUR

"As You Like It"

Stratford, April 1919; Lyric, 21st April—29th May 1920

"John Ferguson"

23rd February 1920—7th April 1920

Some good round Abuse—And some Enthusiastic Eulogy—Sixty Dresses in five and a half weeks—The Streaky Baby—Lovat Fraser's first big Production—Fourteenth-Century Missal-painting taken for Picasso—We go to Stratford—No Cuts—A Happy Company—Lucy's Cattle—Stitching on the banks of the Avon—Keeping Athene Supple—No Eyebrows—The Storm Breaks—"National Criminals"—Manchester and Brighton—London—The Shakespeare Complex—"John Ferguson": a Letter from St. John Ervine—Knowing Nothing about Ireland—Prophecy and Fulfilment—A Discourse on the Nature of Chance.

IV

"ACCORDING to Mr. Littlewood and other authorities, Shakespeare has now a chance of coming into his own again; and instead of one or two companies playing the works of our national dramatic poet, we shall soon be having a hundred.

"It may sound ungrateful, but I hope the forecast is not correct. The mere thought of even twenty sets of young people playing Shakespeare sends me into shudders.

"I have no use for this idea that we must have our Hamlets, our Romeos and Juliets, our Rosalinds at all costs. The village Shylock delights me not. Before the actor can play Shakespeare he has to be taught to do so. He needs his Irving, his Benson, his Calvert, his Ben Greet to teach him. I know it is ridiculous of me to expect any sort of training in an actor, and that it is particularly unreasonable to expect a proper education in Shakespeare, but I cannot help it. I could with greater ease endure Beethoven played out of tune or Debussy set to ragtime than Shakespeare misinterpreted, wrongly emphasized, and deprived of his beauty. I may quarrel with Shakespeare's matter very often, but I yield to no one in veneration for his manner.

"I have just returned from Brighton where, on the Palace Pier, Mr. Nigel Playfair and company have been purporting to produce 'As You Like It,' and anything less like it I have rarely seen. This method of treating Shakespeare as if he were some modern drawing-room playwright, some dramatist of the colloquial telephone school, robbing him of all his beauty and rhythm, his harmony, his overwhelming majesty is simply intolerable. Of all the players engaged only one—Mr. Herbert Marshall, the Jacques—seemed

able to get within a moment's reach of the dignity and weight, the spontaneity, the effulgent charm of Shakespeare's fancy. Most of the others seemed to think they were walking down Bond Street. This is the company that recently visited Stratford-on-Avon with the same play during the Memorial Week. Think of it ! In the very sanctum sanctorum, in the poet's birthplace, to proclaim such a travesty as this—' As You Like It.'

" Before we send Shakespeare touring, or before we produce him in town, we must learn how to act him. To misproduce our greatest dramatist is a national crime, and the perpetrators should be held responsible."

So wrote the eminent critic, Mr. Sydney Carroll, of our production of " As You Like It." As he says, it was not written of our production in London: he scented the storm there had been at Stratford-on-Avon afar, and was so very kind as to take the trouble of coming down to Brighton in order that his article might appear before we came to London at all. Most critics, of course, do not consider it quite playing the game to steal a march on each other in this way, or to prejudice the London production of a play by writing a criticism of it when it is still being tried out on tour. But Mr. Carroll's enthusiasm for the theatre absolves him from any such scruples: no trouble is too much for him in the great cause of conservatism and dramatic art. It is, of course, needless to say that when he wrote it was before modern methods of Shakespeare production had become popular, and before Lovat Fraser's settings were the intellectual fashion—although, to do him justice, one must admit he is not a man easily to change his mind. But he knows well that the best time to nip a new heresy is when it is in the bud. It is *experiment* which is a national crime in the eyes of such critics, the perpetrators of which should be held responsible—not achievement, whatever its nature.

However, just in case your veneration for the race of critics should be such that you feel that they must be right whatever they say, I am going to quote another notice of the same production, and leave you to decide for yourselves which you will believe. I must apologize for quoting other people's opinions in my book at quite such length, but it is obviously impossible for me to give an appraisement, or even a convincing defence, of work which was, at any rate in part, my own, in my own proper person. This passage is from a review of "As You Like It," written by the dramatic critic of the *Spectator*. Then, if you still feel doubtful on which side of the scales to throw your judgment, I will publish a few of Lovat Fraser's designs in the hope of convincing you.

And if it does nothing else, this juxtaposition of the two reviews may, I hope, greatly enlighten you about the fundamental and immutable principles of criticism!

The *Spectator* says:

"Mr. Playfair's production of 'As You Like It' is an event. We have probably all of us from time to time regretted the fact that Shakespeare is dead, but I promise the reader that never will he have so heartily wished him alive again as on the day when he submits himself to the magic of 'a May morning world' by going to see Miss Seyler's Rosalind and Mr. Lovat Fraser's Arden. At last, after innumerable Keans, Garricks, Irvings and Beerbohm Trees have done their worst, the lovers again stand fresh in immortal beauty just surely as the incomparable 'scholar of the heart' imagined them. Alas, that he cannot see his golden children and hear 'the honey of their music vows.'

"In all truth and soberness, the entertainment at the Lyric is, taken all round—play, players, and the delight of the eye—nearer perfection than any stage production that I have ever seen. Probably Mr. Granville-Barker's produc-

tion of ' Twelfth Night ' and the Russian Ballet's ' Good-humoured Ladies ' ought to be excepted, but I think that many people will rank Mr. Playfair's production quite as high, and some will prefer it.

" It is difficult to know where to begin to particularize in praise. Was it the dress or the acting that pleased most, the music or the scene ? Or was it a certain extraordinary impression of vitality and sensibility ? In the first place, Mr. Nigel Playfair's methods succeed in leaving the audience with the impression that ' As You Like It ' is almost the greatest of Shakespeare's plays. Its humanity and sympathy and its charm are unrivalled. Its poetry is limpid and exquisite, like that of ' The Tempest '; it is as well constructed as ' Macbeth,' and almost as metaphysical as ' Hamlet,' while in humour it equals ' Twelfth Night.' These facts are not, I think, striking to a reader of the play, but I think that anyone who had been to the Lyric would agree to this evaluation. Miss Athene Seyler as Rosalind and Mr. Herbert Marshall as Jacques made us conscious of the deep current of the philosophy of life which runs under the play, bearing up its exquisite fragility. Their acting was raised above that of the average of an extraordinarily good cast by their remarkable perception of this inner play. Rosalind and Jacques, they made us feel, were the two clairvoyants of the ' Golden World '—optimist and pessimist philosophers. Like Hamlet, they hear the august harmonies of the lives of men and women, and are respectively moved to pity or stung to contempt for themselves and for those of less vision. But her finer conception does not cut Rosalind off from her kind. Unlike Jacques, she is more of an actor than an onlooker, and her active, restless spirit and her vivid sense of humour lead her inevitably into the part of dea ex machina. Mr. Marshall's remarkable acting gave a curiously bitter, almost sinister, value to the seven ages, that I thought had

long ago been recited out of existence. Not only was his perception of blank verse values exact, but he completely comprehended the conscious anatomist of life.

"Of Miss Seyler* it is difficult to write with the judicial moderation proper to my calling. Lovers of Shakespeare will understand what I mean when I say that she was Rosalind complete; not one turn of all those divine convolutions of gaiety, good humour, and tenderness did she miss. When she was gay she was ravishing, but when she grew tender, she was the pattern and quintessence of all lovers. I have only had the pleasure of seeing her once before. She was then the Frenchified lady in 'Mariage a la Mode,' and I guessed she could act, but wondered whether she would look, the part of Rosalind. But in Mr. Lovat Fraser's dresses she satisfied the eye completely. Mr. Lovat Fraser took late French mediæval costume for the inspiration of a peculiarly gay and engaging sartorial 'air with variations.' His rather restrained and unobtrusive scenery was equally delightful, and I cannot sufficiently admire a certain simple but excellent and new dodge for achieving 'another part of the forest.' The music—played on the stage by a quartet of pages—and one or two set pieces of grouping, were great features of the performance. As for the actors and actresses, their work, individually and collectively, completely satisfied and often surprised. Particularly delightful was their obvious appreciation of the blank verse. Space forbids discriminating in praise. I have therefore added a complete list of the cast, and offer my congratulations to all who propose to themselves the extraordinary pleasure of witnessing Mr. Play-

* It was, I suppose, rather a surprising thing to cast Miss Athene Seyler as Rosalind, for Miss Seyler was at that time known only as a rather idiosyncratic comedy actress, and certainly had not been thought of by other producers for a part of the kind; and it is a great pleasure to me to think this performance laid the foundation-stone of the wider and most well-deserved reputation she has since achieved.

fair's production. Lovers of the drama who do not go to see ' As You Like It ' are laying up eternal regret for themselves. I personally shall go again and again."

Well, let me go back to the beginning. This was in the days when Mr. Bridges Adams had not yet come to the Memorial Theatre at Stratford-on-Avon, and the Festivals were almost entirely conducted by Sir Frank Benson's Company, and when the Benson tradition at Stratford was at the height of its power. Not of course through any desire for a change, but simply, I imagine, in order to spread their favours further afield, we were invited to come and give three performances at the Birthday Festival in 1919—one of " Candida " and two of " As You Like It." Very sensible of the honour that was being done us, we naturally accepted.

Unfortunately our production had to be done in a hurry; but that did not mean any lack of enthusiasm. Naturally " As You Like It " is a play which no producer is likely to feel himself quite unprepared to face, and the Lyric has generally produced its best results when working under the highest pressure possible. I shall come to tell later of some of the marvels which Lovat Fraser accomplished in two or three hours—of the problems he solved in the small hours after the final dress-rehearsal. And although " As You Like It " was done in a hurry, it was in some respects one of the most finished pieces of producing we ever did.

It will seem incredible to anyone who knows Fraser's later work to understand how this earlier work should have seemed so revolutionary. The revolution he afterwards brought about was still in its experimental stage. I suppose it was because it is experiment which is the crime, as I have said above ! On the other hand, it was, so far as I can see, as unlikely to shock as anything well could be: it was simple, yet not nearly so formal and unnaturalistic as it afterwards became. The colour was pure, and most nicely contrasted;

ORLANDO: DESIGN BY CLAUD LOVAT FRASER FOR "AS YOU LIKE IT"

TOUCHSTONE: DESIGN BY CLAUD LOVAT FRASER FOR "AS YOU LIKE IT"

and though the scenery contained many of those improvements on the mechanical side, in the matter of portability and so on, which were so characteristic of him, these were matters outside the knowledge of the audience. In the same way (on a different plane, as it were) I introduced many similar expedients into the production; but kept them as much in subservience to the whole as I could. I have never admired that kind of production which, on introducing a new "stunt," is so anxious that the audience should not overlook its novelty that the whole of the rest of the play is grouped round it. My endeavour, when doing something new, has always been to do it as modestly and unobtrusively as possible—to let it depend on its intrinsic value rather than its novelty for appreciation; or rather, if possible, to let the novelty itself not be noticed at all—only the general effect seem somehow inexplicably improved. However, I don't want to boast: I only say that it has been my aim.

"The dresses," said the *Morning Post*, "are so daring and colouring so extravagant in conception that they seem, to conservative minds at any rate, out of all key with Shakespeare. It surely does not, or should not, depend for its exposition on extraneous and factitious aids."

The truth is that, instead of following the usual Victorian tradition of Shakespearian costume, Fraser went for his inspiration direct to contemporary missals—contemporary, I mean, with the supposed date of the play's action—and copied them with such fidelity that he might have been quite certain the critics would accuse him of historical inaccuracy! One of the sketches I have reproduced shows how characteristically mediæval his designs really were. Even his treatment of the forest scenery was not "cubist," as so many critics imagined; the looped curves by which he represented the foliage were copied exactly from a fourteenth-century missal, not from Picasso or Derain! And what an awful

thing old-fashioned "realistic" stage trees are! Bits of coloured cardboard stuck on strawberry netting! Of a naturalistic stage forest one can truly say that you can't see the wood for the trees! No scene, indeed, is a greater tax on the designer than a forest one, and it is a token of Fraser's genius that *his* forest scene was one of the most successful things he did. He imagined his set right on the edge of the wood: as if the audience were looking from the thickets out towards a back-cloth of open country, and thus he escaped the necessity of representing the delicately gradated shades of the depth of a wood, which are beyond the power of the theatre.

Owing to pressure of time and the need for economy, Mrs. Lovat Fraser undertook to carry out all her husband's dress designs. She made sixty dresses, complete with shoes, and hats, in five and a half weeks for a total cost of £150! It is a feat which, even now, I can hardly believe. Two seamstresses were hired, and installed in poor Lovat's studio; otherwise the sewing was all done by Mrs. Fraser herself and by the cast, who would drop in when rehearsals were over to lend a hand. Even the men came to tack! The material was chiefly unbleached linen (which has beautiful statuesque folds), and every yard of it was dyed in the Frasers' bath—as indeed was their baby, who emerged from the evening tub one night with red and yellow streaks which lasted for weeks. Dyes were still hard to get: the reds and yellows were chiefly done with saffron, and half the chemists in London were ransacked to provide enough of it, and the Frasers' studio smelt like Soho. All this while Lovat worked on at his scenery undisturbed. I wish I could fill this book with designs, and only scatter letterpress here and there: it would give a far better idea of the work of the Lyric Theatre than any mere words. The few drawings here reproduced are a poor tribute to the versatility and

fertility of Lovat's imagination: they can only give an inkling of it. One of his best sets was for the Wrestling scene. In front of the stage was a cloister, forming a sort of false or second proscenium. Under it, in shadow, stood the Court. Beyond was a brilliant sunlit triangle of grass, where they wrestled; behind, a high wall, over which the villagers watched. Thus the wrestlers were half out of sight, continually appearing and disappearing behind the spectators.

Another successful set that Lovat did was for the masque at the end. Most producers cut the masque: it is naturally a problem the manager boggles at to be asked to provide a whole new cast for a few minutes in the last act. But I was determined to do the play with no cuts at all; and I avoided the difficulty by making the actual characters in the play dress up as in a charade. Lovat designed a cart, the tail of which was drawn on to the stage; and with the curtains drawn Rosalind and Celia descended from it in their wedding dresses. That moment was one of the most beautiful that Lovat (I might almost say any modern stage designer) ever contrived.

It was strange how it offended traditionalists for us to play " As You Like It " without cutting a single word; and it only goes to show how easily tradition can choke its own fountain-head. But I was absolutely determined not to cut a single sentence. Partly, I admit, it was bravado: " If they want their Bard," I said to myself, " they shall have him, and have him whole and unadulterated." But it is one thing to decide on a general principle, another to have the necessary courage to put it into effect. When I come to describe our first night you will understand why I felt nervous, and why at a certain moment I found a particularly flamboyant line sticking in my throat. I looked at the serried ranks of godliness, and I stuttered—I am afraid I even mumbled—and then with a rush I tried to start on a few lines later. But

the prompter would have none of it: he obeyed my instructions to the letter—for I had told him that on no account was anybody to cut anything! He bellowed out the offending passage in such a way that it rang to the back of the theatre, and so chastened was I by his firmness that I meekly gave in and repeated the lines yet again after my preceptor.

I suppose I ought to confess that we were really a little proud of our production; and better than being proud of it, we were fond of it. I don't know that I have ever had a happier time than then; and, if I may believe what other members of the company said to me, I think we were all very happy together. Perhaps it was because we were short of money: for to feel one is doing a good thing is very pleasant, but to feel one is doing it on less money than other people do a bad one is sheer heaven!

And so we entered Stratford-on-Avon in a state of awe perhaps, but it was not unmixed with self-confidence. We had no inkling of the storm we were going to raise: we did not even guess that to play Shakespeare un-Bowdlerized would really shock the intellectuals of the Mecca of Drama, and provoke protests even from the late Mr. William Archer.

And I am afraid we offended officialdom even before the curtain went up: we had no idea how powerful and deep-rooted tradition in the matter of settings at this Festival had become.

Now you will remember that there is a story that Shakespeare was caught poaching deer in Sir Thomas Lucy's park, so it was only natural that in forming the Shakespeare Museum a deer from this very park should be killed and stuffed and placed on exhibition; and what more charming bit of sentiment could be imagined than to borrow this deer every year from the Museum and prop it up against the

back-cloth in any pastoral Shakespearian scene? The idea, from a sentimental point of view, was most touching; but the poor deer had been propped up and put away again so often that it was now thoroughly moth-eaten; and, needless to say, it was hardly in keeping with the kind of production we intended. And so I firmly refused to listen to any of the many hints I received that it was my duty to borrow it for "As You Like It." Such a piece of iconoclasm, apparently, had never been heard of at Stratford before, and was passed round the town with bated breath.

We worked up till the last minute—in fact, two or three days before the play was produced Lovat and I decided to scrap one of the dresses and have a new one. Mrs. Fraser, as usual, was equal to the occasion, and that although the Easter holidays were in full swing and no shop would be open where we could buy materials until the morning of the actual performance! Just how she did it is one of those mysteries women guard so jealously; but that dress was ready when it was wanted. She and Athene Seyler sat on the banks of the Avon stitching it; and if the truth were known I believe Mr. Bertram Binyon—rather than go on the stage unclothed—helped them with it. And then an awful catastrophe happened. Whether it was through sewing on the banks of the Avon I don't know, but on the night before we were to appear poor Miss Seyler was crippled with rheumatism—she could hardly stand. A doctor was sent for, and at first he said it would be quite impossible for her to appear. But where there's a will there's a way: Miss Seyler was not going to give in. Then he said that there was only one hope—she must never sit down, we must keep her on the run until the curtain went up or she would stiffen. And so the whole company took turns at what we, I am afraid rather frivolously, called "keeping Athene supple," and ran her up and down the streets of Stratford for hours

and hours and hours. How she got on the boards at all I don't know, how she gave the magnificent performance she did I not only don't know—I cannot begin to guess.

It will give you some idea of how well the company worked together when I tell you that Lovat Fraser insisted that all the ladies must appear without eyebrows, since that was the contemporary fashion. There were storms naturally, but they gave in with a good grace. If you have ever tried to deprive an actress of her eyebrows you will realize what it means when I say that the cast actually gave in almost without demur.

Also we had not enough men to go round for our Forest Lords scene—some of them had to be women. One little Gaiety lady, I remember, thought she was going to go on the stage as a sort of Principal Boy; and it was much to her horror that she heard Lovat and me saying that she looked too young, and must wear a beard! First to lose one's eyebrows, then to be made to wear a beard! It was almost more than flesh and blood could stand. She wept, but in the end she did it. And there is a sequel to this story: over a year afterwards, when we produced "As You Like It" in London, I happened to notice that she had of her own free will blued her jowl, and creased her forehead and made herself into the most ferocious and weather-beaten forest lord that ever there was!

Then came our actual performance. Whether it was curiosity to see how "As You Like It" could possibly be staged without the aid of Lucy's cattle I cannot say, but we certainly had a record house; and so far as one could tell, the audience approved of the production. There were no boos, no hisses; on the contrary, there was more than the usual amount of applause.

By way of an orchestra we had a particularly fine concert quartet, who played Arthur Bliss's arrangements of Eliza-

A COTTAGE IN THE FOREST OF ARDEN: DESIGN BY CLAUD LOVAT FRASER FOR "AS YOU LIKE IT"

bethan airs under his own conducting. Before the curtain rose they sat in front of it: when it was up they took their places actually on the stage. Accustomed as they were to concert manners and the respect with which music is treated in concert-halls, they were so much upset at the rudeness of an audience which walked about and talked and took no more notice of the overture than if it had been the tootling of a piano in a cinema, that they went on strike; they stopped playing altogether, and it was with the utmost difficulty that the stage manager was able to persuade them to go on. They felt, very rightly, that they had never been more rudely treated in their lives; but that is a thing theatrical orchestras soon become used to, I am afraid.

When the curtain rose the audience were puzzled perhaps, but they listened and looked with respect and attention. But it was outside the theatre that the storm raged, and it attained a ferocity I should hardly have thought possible. When I came into my hotel I was certainly treated as a " national criminal ": people turned their backs—got up and walked out of a room which I came into. The rest of the cast fared little better: they were cut and cold-shouldered almost everywhere. When Lovat Fraser himself was walking in the street a woman came up to him and shook her fist in his face. " Young man," she said impressively, " how dare you meddle with Our Shakespeare!" When Mr. Flower, the chairman of the Memorial Committee (and a good friend of mine), was making his closing speech at the end of the Festival, he was evidently somewhat at a loss to know what to say about us. " What shall I say of ' As You Like It ? ' " he asked the audience. It was evidently no purely rhetorical question: he hoped for some sign from them—a boo or a cheer. But no sign was vouchsafed unto him—they waited to hear what *he* had to say, and I think he was rather at a loss.

From Stratford we went to Manchester, where we were cheered by a most eulogistic article on us in the *Manchester Guardian* by Mr. C. E. Montague, a critic in respect for whom I yield to none. And from Manchester we went to Brighton. I was very anxious to take the production to London, but the year's run of "Abraham Lincoln" was still only in half course, and we had to wait, first for it and then for the end of "John Ferguson," before the theatre was free and we had our chance to try the production on a London audience. This was not till 21st April 1920.

Meanwhile Mr. Carroll thought it his duty to take the train to Brighton and nip the heresy in the bud! But go to London we did, in spite of Mr. Carroll and the stormy burgesses of Stratford. It was now almost exactly a year from our first appearance at Stratford. In London this essentially common-sense production was received more as I had expected. Except for the *Morning Post* (and even that was fairly guarded), nobody seemed to regard it as dangerously revolutionary. The *Spectator's* opinion I have quoted: there were many other enthusiasts.

But London audiences have a sort of colossal immobility. If they were not as angry as the Birthday celebrators, they were certainly not all as appreciative as the critic of the *Spectator*; or rather, those who came to see it were, but the inhibition latent in all Londoners, with the exception of the wonderful critical audience at "the Old Vic," against ever going to see a play by Shakespeare—an inhibition, I suspect, inculcated into them early in life by schoolmasters and schoolmistresses in dreary literature classes, from which few people are strong enough to recover—prevented any chance of a real success.

We ran it for just five weeks, but were too poor to be able to keep it on any longer.

For continuity's sake I have followed the history of this

production right through, although, chronologically speaking, I should have dealt with "John Ferguson" first, for, as I have mentioned, it was not till "John Ferguson" came off that we put "As You Like It" on at the Lyric. Also, of course, in the history of *our* theatre (I don't mean in the history of the theatre in general) the production of "As You Like It" is far more important of the two, if only in the light of subsequent events. "As You Like It" was a regular step in the development of what now appear to be the characteristic qualities of *our* theatre: "John Ferguson" was, like Stanley Houghton's play, in a sense outside our province. And although I think I can claim, without too much boasting, that our production of "As You Like It" had a certain effect, at any rate among the younger generation of Shakespearian producers, I cannot claim that our production of Mr. St. John Ervine's play was of any particular importance: the important production of *that* was the one given by the Theatre Guild in America, which made their name, and to a certain extent, St. John Ervine's name, too.

When I was thinking of writing this book I asked Mr. St. John Ervine to send me some account of the play's history; and the letter I had from him seems so interesting—to put the history of the piece so clearly in a nut-shell—that I am printing it in full:

"PARIS,
"*9th December* 1924.

"MY DEAR PLAYFAIR,

"Roughly, this is the story of 'John Ferguson.' About two years before the outbreak of the War I thought I'd like to do a play about a man whose religious faith was put to almost unendurable tests and yet survived. The story of Job, in short, although the similarity between my theme and that of Job did not occur to me then. I have often noticed,

by the way, that when I get an idea for a play or a story which turns out to be one as old and familiar as the hills I do not immediately see it as any other than an astoundingly original one. Sometimes I do not see the similarity until more discerning people point it out to me. This is a sort of thickness which affects many authors.

"I did not attempt to write the play, although I often thought about it, until after the War had begun. Then it demanded to be written. I had exactly £30 in the world, on which I had to maintain myself and my wife, and the time, therefore, did not seem quite the most suitable one for writing what would probably be an unpopular and even unsaleable play. My common sense urged me to find some other employment until times were happier, but my common sense got completely 'wiped' by the play's urgent demand that it should be written. You are to imagine me, then, with £30 between me and debt, and with absolutely no prospect of getting any more, sitting down to write a gloomy play. The £30 just lasted long enough for me to get the play finished, after which things got slightly easier for me so far as money was concerned. But the chance of getting the play performed was not great. I offered it to W. B. Yeats for the Abbey, who accepted it on *his* conditions, but not on *mine*, whereupon, a little stupidly, as I now think, I demanded the return of the MS., swearing that I would rather not have the play done at all than on any other terms than mine. Yeats was very sensible about it, and said that whenever I liked to send the play back to the Abbey on *his* terms he would be delighted to do it there. Here was a dilemma if you like. The Abbey was the only theatre at all likely to produce the play at that time—and I had fatuously quarrelled with the Abbey. To find a way out of my trouble I then did what must seem to you a still more fatuous thing. I sent the play to George Alexander and suggested that *he*

should produce it! Alexander read it, hesitated over it, and then sent it back to me with a very complimentary letter. Soon after I had taken the rejected play from the postman my telephone bell rang. George Alexander, making-up for the performance that evening, had telephoned to me and wanted the play back again. Would I please come and see him on the following afternoon in Pont Street? Would I hell? . . . I went—the day was cold and wet and full of snow—and Alexander told me all about the Greek drama in his study, which had glass-panelled doors so that everybody passing up and downstairs could see him studying. I left him in a stupefied state. Not only was he going to do the play, probably at matinee performances, but he himself was going to play the part of John Ferguson! . . . I thought to myself, as I staggered into the snow again: 'His followers will get something of a shock when they see him as a County Down farmer in corduroys!' But I need not have worried myself so much, for Alexander thought about the play again and finally decided not to do it.

"Two years went by. I composed my quarrel with the Abbey at the end of that period, and the play was performed for the first time at the Abbey. Two more years went by, during which time I had been to France and 'got my packet,' as the soldiers used to say. One day, while I was convalescing in Devonshire, I received a telegram, signed 'Langner,' asking me to let the Theatre Guild of New York do 'John Ferguson.' I had never heard of Langner or of the Theatre Guild of New York. I wrote to several of my friends, Bernard Shaw, Bernard Fagan, and others, and asked them if they knew anything of them. They did not. My agent, the late J. B. Pinker, who was always a cautious man, said: 'Don't let them do it unless they give you an advance of £200.' We cabled to Langner at the address given to that effect. He replied that they had not got 200 dollars, let alone £200.

Then Bernard Fagan gave me sound advice. He said: ' This play will never be a popular one. You want production. Let them do it. You won't get any money, but you may get some kudos.' I took his advice. The Theatre Guild, which was almost on its uppers, produced the play—and instead of running for a week, as we all expected, it ran for nine months, established the Theatre Guild as the most remarkable theatrical organization in the world, and, incidentally, made me fairly comfortable. The Theatre Guild, which was not in existence six years ago and started its work with a total capital of 500 dollars, is now building a new theatre and is a very prosperous institution.

" The story of how the Guild came to know about my play is rather odd. I had published it in book form, and one day a young man, called Lawrence Langner, walked into Brentano's in Fifth Avenue. It was he who had put up most of the 500 dollars to start the Guild, and he was feeling a bit blue about them. While searching the shelves of Brentano's he saw my play and remembered that years previously he and I had been members of a debating society called the West London Parliament, which used to meet in the Marylebone Town Hall. His remembrance of my name caused him to take down the play and begin to read it. As the shop was about to be shut he bought the play and took it home with him, and the result was that he urged his comrades in the Guild to produce it.

" I have forgotten just when you came into the story—I think while the play was being done in New York. Anyhow, you decided to do it immediately after the run of ' Abraham Lincoln ' was ended. I was in America while the play was rehearsed and produced by you, and only got back in time to see the last performance—and a remarkable production you gave the play. I was, in fact, exceedingly fortunate in both my producers and players—in London and New York

—and I wish that your reward had been as great as that of the New York management. But the time was not suitable for the production of that sort of play in London. People's feelings were too sore still, and so the run in London was considerably shorter than the New York one, although it was not such a bad run for such a piece at such a time. Anyhow, it gave me the right to claim a mention of myself in the remarkable history of the Lyric Opera House, and that is a right of which I am proud. To have had my play associated with two new and fine and successful theatrical organizations is matter for boasting—and you need not be afraid that I shall ever show any unwillingness to boast of it.

"Yours sincerely,

"ST. JOHN ERVINE."

Curiously enough I had never heard of this Theatre Guild production when I decided to do the play myself. The book was sent me by an agent in the ordinary way through the post; and, contrary to popular supposition, I *do* read plays that are sent to me in that way. It is historically interesting in that it represents a fusion between the two most important recent schools of dramatic writing (I apologize for talking like an American text-book)—the Manchester School and the Abbey Theatre School. I don't myself think it is quite such a good play as "Mixed Marriage"; but it exhibits the same qualities—qualities which are characteristic of Mr. Ervine—an extraordinarily competent sense of dramatic construction, combined with a distinct, though somewhat repressed, element of the poetic.

An old farmer, John Ferguson, is on the verge of ruin. His farm is mortgaged to Henry Witherow, and when the interest falls due he cannot pay it. He appeals to a brother in America: he and his family watch anxiously for a reply. It does not come. Jimmy Caesar offers to pay off the mortgage

if Hannah, John's daughter, will marry him. She loathes him, but consents; then shrinks. Her father refuses to accept the sacrifice. She goes to Witherow's farm to tell him he must foreclose: Witherow outrages her, and she comes home riven with shame and grief. Jimmy, who has always hated Witherow, and many times threatened to kill him, vows he will shoot him, and goes off. His courage fails him, and he spends the night cowering in a whin-bush, cursing himself and his impotence. Andrew, Hannah's brother, egged on by a half-witted beggar, Clutie John, shoots Witherow. John is arrested, and lies in gaol for two weeks. Then Andrew, unable to bear the reproach of his conscience, tells his parents, and goes out to give himself up to the police.

This is a very bald and unprepossessing analysis: I am not, I am afraid, a literary critic. But to the imaginative reader it will show something of what I mean. I showed the play to many critics of greater authority than myself, and they were equally impressed. We set to work to produce it.

I was not, of course, particularly fitted for the task. I know nothing about Ireland (it appears, from the correspondence columns of the daily press, as if I were the only man in England who could make such a boast!); and undoubtedly I missed a lot of local atmosphere. But the play seems to me essentially a dramatic one: I mean, it depends on a fundamental conflict of tragic emotion—not on the merely sentimental attraction of dialect and colour. Indeed, I am not at all sure that plays of this kind are not almost better played *without* too much attention to local colour; their fundamental merit, if it is there, is only liable to be obscured by the fripperies of the superficially bizarre: if it is not there—why, they are bad plays, and that's all there is to it! However, although I mean this seriously, you will probably think I am only making excuses for myself—making a virtue of my own ignorance.

Mr. Rea, whose success in "Abraham Lincoln" had been so great, I cast for John Ferguson. It was a part which needed that solidity of personality which Mr. Rea had known so well how to put into his earlier rôle. But I admit that the part did not suit him so well as Mr. Drinkwater's hero: he played it finely, but not so outstandingly as he had done before. Mr. J. M. Kerrigan as Jimmy Caesar, the villain, was far more successful; in sending him to America, we, if for literary and dramatic purposes I may reconstitute the Union, are losing one of our few really great actors; the performance of Miles Malleson as Clutie John, the half-wit, was excellent; as was the almost too heart-rending playing of Moyna McGill; but J. M. Kerrigan as Jimmy Caesar was the outstanding performance of the piece.

When it got near the first night we tried an expedient that we have never done before or since. We gave an invitation dress rehearsal, to which many people of weight in the dramatic world were invited. I have seldom seen an intelligent audience more moved: one and all prophesied that we should have a big success—bigger and more immediate than "Abraham Lincoln." I was a little doubtful myself; but still I felt that the odds were on our side.

Then came the first night. There was very little of the prophesied enthusiasm: the feel of the audience was much the same as had been that of the earlier audiences in "Abraham Lincoln." But in the case of "Abraham Lincoln" there was a subsequent reaction in our favour; to "John Ferguson" that reaction never came. It just goes to show what trust can be put in the prophecies of even the wisest dramatic tipsters. The play commanded respect, of course—it was bound to do that; but the public never took to it. We had no money to lose, "As You Like It" was waiting, and behind "As You Like It" was a grim successor—Bankruptcy. If we allowed ourselves to lose heavily on "John

Ferguson" we should not get another chance. And so, when we were forty pounds down, I was compelled to withdraw it.

The more I advance in years the more unwilling I become to prophesy whether a play will be a success or a failure. I would sooner bet my last dollar on which of my friends will fall in love with each other—and that shows how strongly I feel about it! For one can say that Albert is the man for Louisa, that Jane would suit John down to the ground: one can say that if Thomas *will* go away and play golf every day and leave Lucinda to dance to the gramophone with William, they are bound to—but they are *not* bound to, as we know very well. They may or they may not: just as Louisa *may* fall in love with the incompatible John, and Albert with Jane. And in the same way, however one may exercise oneself in the wise calculation of psychological probabilities, all one can say in the end of a play, too, is this—it may succeed or it may fail.

Here we were, producing a play which was in the middle of a nine months' run in New York—a play which every man of intelligence in London said was a sure thing, and we had to confess defeat with a debit balance of forty pounds. If my son, when he grows up, shall show signs of indulging in this infernal gamble of play-promotion, I shall beg him with honest parental tears in my eyes to settle down to some safe, sober and humdrum profession like backing horses or trying out systems at Monte Carlo.

CHAPTER FIVE

"The Beggar's Opera": Old Style

Piling Pelion on Ossa — My Excuse — The Authorship of the Opera—Swift and Pope—Jack Sheppard—The Music: Gay, Pepusch, and the Duchess—Not a Parody—Our Neighbours—Colley Cibber—Rich, Quin and Lavinia Fenton—The First Night—A Tradition Assailed—Its vast Success—Politics—Morals—The Sad End of Mrs. Fitzherbert—Revivals—The Theatre and the Peerage—Polly and the Dentist—The Character of Polly.

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BEFORE I set out on the history of the revival of "The Beggar's Opera" at this theatre, and endeavour to analyse the cause of its success, it will be necessary for me to mark its source and trace its career during the past two hundred years. It is a task which of necessity I must approach with a certain diffidence, because a vast amount of literature on the subject was already in existence before the date of our production (though most of it had found its way into the tuppenny shelves). Since then, not only has its value risen (to the *chagrin* of one or two collectors), but a whole *new* set of volumes have made their appearance. One gentleman wrote to me from America that the hobby of his life was at an end, that he was broken-hearted and on the verge of bankruptcy; so it is indeed a good wind that blows nobody any harm.

What excuses can there be, then, for my writing any more upon the subject? Just these two: a book about the Lyric Theatre without at least two chapters on "The Beggar's Opera" is an unthinkable absurdity. There are many people, one hopes, who will like to have this information in a handy form, and who, though they may buy this book, may not necessarily boast that genteel equipment, a well-stocked library (I don't myself).

Secondly, my practical experience of the opera upon the stage has taught me that nearly all the writers who have read and considered it in book form have made many quite obvious mistakes in their critical consideration which I may be allowed in all humility to correct. For it cannot be too insistently stated that no plays intended for public performance upon the stage can be satisfactorily judged in their

entirety without a certain practical knowledge of stage conditions. I don't mean (heaven defend!) that all editors of Shakespeare and Sheridan and Congreve should be actor-managers first and literary critics and graceful writers afterwards; but I know very few editions of any dramatic author whose notes and prefaces would not be a great deal clarified and improved if their authors had taken steps to obtain a little expert information in those theatrical circles which most of them have been delicately bred to avoid and despise. You may find a few commentators—the name of Desmond McCarthy occurs instantly to me—with the theatre instinct born in them, as it were, but they are very, very rare.

To begin at the beginning.

There was a certain amount of controversy, both in the eighteenth century and since, about the actual purity of authorship of the opera. Gay wrote it and signed it, but there is little doubt that Swift and Pope had a hand in a song or two—probably no more; although at the time there were plenty of jealous people ready to affirm that Gay could not have written it at all, and to put it down to Pope. Colley Cibber (who had reason to make catty remarks about the opera), on seeing a knife lying on the table with the name of the manufacturer, Gay, on it, exclaimed, " Oh, so Mr. Pope makes knives, too ! "

Pope and Gay had already collaborated in " Three Hours after Marriage."

But to set against popular deduction, there is Pope's own explicit statement: " Gay was the sole author of ' The Beggar's Opera.' I own appearances are against him, for it was written in the same house with me and Dr. Swift. He used to communicate the parts as he wrote them to us, but neither of us did any more than alter an expression here and there."

As for the original idea of the opera, it is generally

accredited to Swift ; but it was rather a remark of Swift's which engendered the notion in Gay's brain than that Swift himself conceived it. Swift suggested to Gay that " A Newgate Pastoral might be an odd pretty sort of thing " (and one can well imagine what an odd pretty sort of thing it would have been in Swift's own hands !); Gay about this time had lost every penny in the South Sea Bubble, and his ears were acock for suggestions for restoring his fortunes. But the idea as Gay produced it was not only not Swift's, but did not win Swift's approval : when Gay sketched to him his conception of a Beggar's Opera, Swift was very doubtful as to whether it could be done. But Swift's " Newgate Pastoral," which would probably have been one of the grimmest plays ever written, would certainly not have had Gay's success; for the theatre public, at any rate, has little patience with those who come:

Vice to revile,
Sin to exile.

There are other sources, too, to which one can trace the idea as well as Swift's suggestion. Notably, of course, there is the execution of Jack Sheppard, and the tremendous stir it made. Throughout the autumn of 1725, Sheppard kept all London breathless with excitement by his repeated escapes from prison; and when he finally took the road from Newgate to Tyburn it was more like a coronation procession than an execution. Indeed it ended in a riot. A rumour got around that the body of the popular hero was to be given for dissection; so the crowd mobbed the undertaker and carried off the body to an ale-house in Long Acre to lie in state. The next day the riot was worse, and the magistrates had to apply for a party of foot-guards. The body was recovered and handed over, apparently, to Sheppard's personal friends; " and the same night about ten it was interr'd in an

Elm Coffin at St. Martin's-in-the-Fields, with a velvet paul over it, and the funeral service performed, etc., the guards marching on each side of the coach in which the coffin was carry'd with bayonets fix'd at the ends of their muskets." Within a few months biographies of Sheppard were on sale in every book shop: even Defoe wrote one. A Sheppard harlequinade was produced at Drury Lane; and a play, " The Prison-Breaker, or The Adventures of John Sheppard," was written and " intended to be acted at the Theatre Royal in Lincoln's Inn Fields." All arrangements, indeed, were made for the play's production, but it never saw the boards. That Gay was, to a certain extent, indebted to it for his idea one cannot deny, but he so completely eclipsed what he imitated that the " Prison-Breaker " has hardly been heard of since. One might say that the debt of an opera to a play is bound to be slight—not so great, for instance, as the debt of one play to another might be. But one must remember that in the eighteenth century the term " opera " was not nearly so rigid in meaning as it is now : almost anything was described as opera, and, at the success of the Italian Opera then introduced into England, managers were naturally anxious to incorporate the word in the title of a piece if they could conceivably do so. There is a story that at the first night of " The Beggar's Opera " the audience grew restive at the absence of an overture, and Lockit was shoved through the curtain to pacify them. He lost his head, and all that he succeeded in saying was, " Gentlemen, you know very well that one never has music with an opera ! " That remark brought the house down; but it was not quite so absurd as it now sounds, and there is good reason to believe that when Gay first wrote his Beggar's Opera it *had* no music ! There was singing, of course, but it was to have been unaccompanied. It was the Duchess of Queensberry, who took a lively interest in the rehearsals, who first suggested

the introduction of an orchestra. "The Beggar's Opera" without music does not sound attractive—but as a matter of fact, it was obviously a good enough play to stand intact, and it was occasionally played without music in the provinces and in fit-ups as late as the middle of the nineteenth century.

That brings one to another question—the allotting of credit for the music. It is frequently said that Gay composed "The Beggar's Opera." That, of course, is a considerable over-statement. As far as there was any composing at all, it is supposed to have been done by Dr. Pepusch. But Dr. Pepusch was a very unlikely person: he was a typical example of the dry-as-dust type of musician—"very humdrum," wrote Mrs. Delaney—a German, who had formerly been a Court musician at Berlin, but had left that city through dislike of the reigning family, and settled in England, which he found a sadly barbarous country in musical matters, and which he felt it was his duty to instruct in German methods and ideals. It is a curious bit of irony that the most creditable thing to his name should be one of the most purely English opera scores, and, to his mind, one of the most barbarous types of music that have ever been written!

Probably the credit is threefold. The Duchess suggested that music should be written, Gay chose the tunes (making free use of Purcell and even Handel in the process), and Pepusch did the donkey-work of scoring and harmonizing, probably not without protest.

There is good reason for thinking that the tunes were chosen by Gay himself. His connection with the noble company of ballad-singers is well known: both he and Swift wrote many of the most popular street-ballads of that time, and it was largely through this that Gay secured his *entrée* into mendicant circles. Not only had he a unique opportunity of seeing the life he wrote about at first hand, but he would be bound to have all the popular tunes of the day at

his finger-tips. He was, moreover, a distinguished amateur of music, as witness his couplet from "Trivia":

> Then Handel strikes the strings, the melting strain
> Transports the soul, and thrills through every brain.

and a player of the then fashionable flute.

There is just one more question which requires discussion before I turn to actual event. It has been frequently stated, and especially in the newspapers, that Gay wrote the opera as a parody on the Italian Opera of the day. I think what I have said of the history of the actual writing will show this to be false. If one is trying to parody a certain sort of music, one does not simply introduce music as an afterthought. If Gay's intention had been to parody Italian Opera it was certainly easy game, with its extraordinarily rigid conventions and the vast element of the ridiculous that was in it already. It was (some of it) indeed almost its own best parody: the very slightest tinge of the extra-ridiculous would have set all London laughing, and probably have dealt a very shrewd blow to the propriety of the behaviour of audiences at the serious operas themselves.

Don't run away with the idea, though, that all the Italian operas—or rather, operas with Italian *libretti*—were in themselves ridiculous. Queer to us, with our modern notions of scenery and dresses, they might indeed appear; but to suppose that there was anything essentially ridiculous in Handel's "Rinaldo" and "Julius Caesar" is absurd, as could very easily be proved were performances of them to be given with the same scenic designs as were used in his day. It is a thousand pities that economic conditions at present seem to render such experiments impossible.

But "The Beggar's Opera" is something quite different. It is not a parody so much as a rival. That it exhibits a certain contempt for Italian Opera goes without saying, for it

is certainly no imitation of it; but it stood on its own legs—it was not simply engaged in trying to knock the legs from under something else.

Although not in intention a parody, in effect "The Beggar's Opera" proved the doom for the moment of "outlandish music" in England. But it did so by honest rivalry, not by assassination. When it was put on, the so-called Royal Academy of Music (which was, in fact, a vast grand opera syndicate in which the King himself had taken shares to the value of a thousand pounds), was in a most flourishing condition. It engaged the exclusive services as composers of Handel, Bononcini, and Ariosto, and had certainly the exclusive support of the fashionable world, to the great detriment of the legitimate actors, whose theatres languished into obscurity. But within one short year of the production of "The Beggar's Opera" the tables were turned: the syndicate was bankrupt: Handel was defeated by Dr. Pepusch—or rather, by folk-song—and rococo palaces were found less attractive than the Old Bailey. As one indignant Italian wrote plaintively to a friend, "This simple Signor did tri to pelt mi countrymen out of England with lumps of pudding"—"Lumps of Pudding" being the air to which was set the final chorus and dance. And out of England "Lumps of Pudding" *did* pelt them! Like "Lillibullero," it was an immensely popular melody in the eighteenth century; but like "Lillibullero," curiously enough, it never attained any wide popularity in our production, although they were both liked well enough.

It is a strange thing—this—the way the balance of popularity shifted from one air in the opera to another with the lapse of time. We did not use "Lillibullero" at all in our original production, but in the revised version we set "The Modes of the Court" to it. Taking the tip from Uncle Toby, I had the tune whistled by the chorus. But somehow

it never caught on: the stage-hands and the young people down our alley, who used to whistle " Over the Hills " and " Before the Barn Door Crowing " till I almost prayed to be struck deaf, never whistled " Lumps of Pudding " or " Lillibullero." And yet, in the eighteenth-century production, " Before the Barn Door Crowing " fell quite flat, and was soon omitted altogether, while with us it was by far the most popular number in the piece ! Nor was it only the accompanying " business " which accounted for its success with us, for I am afraid the children of the neighbourhood had not much opportunity of learning our tunes except by listening in the passage-way by the stage-door: to them " The Beggar's Opera " was as devoid of visible action as a radio-play, and their choice might be taken as a very fair criterion of the quality of popularity in a piece of music,

Some day we must give a performance specially for them. But I wonder whether they would like it ? They might think the old " Blood-and-Flea-Pit " had fallen on sadly dull days. If they have any respect for the Lyric, they show it in odd ways; for instance, by banging the doors during matinees, when affectingly soft passages are being spoken. Locally, at any rate, the general myth about our making our fortunes is not credited. " Don't you beg off *'er*, Lizzie," I heard a mother shouting from a top window only the other day, when a young actress was being assailed for a copper: " They don't pay too much wages in there, they don't ! "

Well, well !

Mr. Gay wrote his Opera, and read it to his friends; and presently submitted it to Colley Cibber for Drury Lane, and Colley Cibber refused it. If " The Beggar's Opera " is a classic example of a pot-boiler, I suppose Colley Cibber's rejection is a classic example of a managerial mistake. But it was, as a matter of fact, a great stroke of luck for Gay that he did refuse it. For one thing, if it had been produced at

Drury Lane he would not have had Lavinia Fenton for his Polly, or Walker for Macheath; and it was, at any rate on the first night, a moot question whether Polly made the success of Lavinia, or Lavinia of Polly.

He then showed it to Rich, and Rich accepted it. His first attempt at casting was not too lucky: he chose Quin for Macheath. Now Quin was a heavy actor of great note, and to be heavy in the eighteenth century was heavy indeed! Rich himself actually discharged another actor, Macklin, for speaking too familiarly on the stage. The acting of such tragedies as Cato was simply an exercise in declamation: plays were produced in such a way as to have practically no cohesion. An actor who had spoken a favourite speech in the favourite manner would actually be encored, and made to say it over again. Imagine that in a tragedy ! Nor were the actors allowed any originality in their conceptions: tradition ruled the roost. As a play had once been acted, it had always to be acted: a single change of inflection, a single bit of new business or omission of old business was not admissible; and the audience, who had probably seen the play many times before, would shout and boo at such stage-Radicalism. Quin himself had made his success in Cato by the solemnity and weight of his declamation. What a Macheath!

But Quin had more sense than many other actors: he threw up the part. Whether it was because he realized he could never play it, or because he thought it beneath his dignity I do not know. But Walker was given it, and a better choice could hardly have been made.

As for Polly, Lavinia Fenton was cast for it from the first. There are few actresses about whom a greater body of myth has grown up than Miss Fenton. The penalty of success was a series of scurrilous, and mostly entirely imaginary, " Lives," and to winnow the few grains of truth from them is by no means an easy matter. She was the daughter of a

lady who kept a coffee-house at Charing Cross; but whether her father was Mr. Fenton (who seems to have been something of an accommodation husband, and to have been more often in gaol than at his wife's coffee-house), or, as has been affirmed, an officer in the Lancers, is a matter for those contemporary biographers to settle with their own consciences. She attracted attention early, both by her looks and her voice, and drew many customers, while still a child, to the coffee-house. One of the biographers says, too, that she was not without admirers when at boarding-school—in especial, a respectable young lawyer's clerk, who was madly infatuated with her, and only prevented from marrying her by the feeling that it would disgrace his family. If that is true, it must have caused him no little *chagrin* to see her at last a Duchess!

Polly was not her first part, but it was her first big part. Her first appearance was in 1726, in "The Orphan," at the Haymarket. Guileless biographers took it for granted that she played an important rôle, though this was not only unlikely—it was untrue. They said that she played Monimia; but if she did, the contemporary press were sadly deceived, for the *Daily Post* of 23rd February allots the part to Mrs. Houghton. Lavinia is not even referred to by name at all—simply called "a gentlewoman who has never appeared on any stage before"; and her part was Serena, who was little more than an "extra lady." Her next part was Lucilla in William Davenant's "The Man's the Master": even in that she had little chance of attracting notice—for it is difficult for an actress to win fame for her beauty when she has to appear on the stage heavily veiled! Her first part of any size at all was that of Mrs. Squeamish in "The Country Wife." She then played Cherry in "The Beau's Stratagem." It was no sudden leap to fame, such as comes to actresses in novels: Lavinia had served a good apprenticeship before she appeared as Polly. So it is erroneous to say that it was

"The Beggar's Opera" which first made her name: but it *is* true that it carried her reputation beyond all bounds. And this star actress, at the height of her fame, was paid a salary of fifteen shillings a week; subsequently increased, when the Duke was on the point of running off with her, to thirty shillings! Oh, to have been a manager in those halcyon days!

Twenty-ninth January 1728 was the date of the first night. The house was crowded: the butchers of Clare Market and, one suspects, many of Gay's friends and acquaintances in low life, filled the cheaper seats, while his friends (and even his enemies) in high life were there, too: the Duchess of Queensberry, of course, and the Duke of Bolton, the Duke of Bedford, and the Duke of Argyll—even Sir Robert Walpole was there. As for Swift and Addison, of whose presence Gilfillan gives a most imaginative and circumstantial account, Swift was away in Ireland, and Addison had been dead for nine years. But Pope was there, and has written the only authentic account of it.

"We were all at the first night of it," says Pope, "in great uncertainty of the event, till we were very much encouraged by hearing the Duke of Argyll, who sat in the next box to us, say, 'It'll do—it must do—I see it in the eyes of them!' This was a good while before the first act was over; and so gave us ease soon, for the Duke (besides his own good taste) has as particular a knack as anyone now living in discovering the taste of the public. He was quite right in this as usual: the good nature of the audience appeared stronger and stronger every act, and ended in a clamour of applause."

Here indeed history did in my experience repeat itself. On the first night, and indeed for the first few weeks, the first act was inclined to proceed without much evidence of pleasing the audience: in America, indeed, it hardly provoked a smile. I think the humour in the dialogue is a little

hidden, and both the actors need practice to deliver and the audience to receive it.

Congreve said of it, "It will either take greatly or be damned confoundedly." There is a tradition that it was touch-and-go which would happen until it came to Polly's song:

Oh, ponder well, be not severe,
So save a wretched wife;
For on the rope that hangs my dear
Depends poor Polly's life.

but that that song brought the house down. It is an odd story, if true. That there has really been so great a change in taste—that an eighteenth-century audience was so much quicker than a modern one to appreciate delicate points I find it difficult to believe.* Now, that song, exquisitely sung as it was at our performance by Sylvia Nelis, never evoked more than a mildly amiable response; nor would I, as a producer, have expected it to do so. The tune is gently appealing, rather than provocative; and the words, charming as they are, seem to me to have an appeal more literary than dramatic —to be more effective in the study than on the stage. I don't know what the authority for the tradition is, but I cannot help suspecting it to be traceable to someone who read the play in his own arm-chair, rather than someone who stood in the pit that first night.

At any rate, "take greatly" it did. A few weeks later Pope wrote to Swift, "Mr. Gay's Opera has been acted over forty days running, and will certainly continue the whole season; so he has more than a fence about his thousand pounds—he will soon be thinking of a fence about his two thousand pounds." This was, as a matter of fact, a slight exaggeration: at the end of its thirty-sixth representation, Rich had netted nearly four thousand pounds, but Gay's receipts were only a sum just under seven hundred pounds.

* Cf. Chap. xii, page 206. "The wall between the church and synagogue."

But all the same, it was the greatest theatrical success there had ever been. It ran, in this production, for sixty-three nights, and then went on tour to Scotland: it was the first English play to do so, and there was at that time no regular theatre established in the whole of the Northern Kingdom. It also played successfully in Wales, Ireland, and Minorca; but when the company visited the West Indies they unhappily all perished of yellow fever. Nevertheless, since that sixty-three nights it has run on and off for nearly two hundred years.

There even exists a contemporary German translation, and those who know that language will appreciate a delicious misconception that occurs in it. One of the airs used and acknowledged is the old Scotch melody called "Gin thou wert mine awn Thing." The translator, knowing more perhaps of Scotch habits than idioms, renders this "Schnaps (*sic*) Du bist meine einzige Freude"!

Probably what was far more responsible for its immediate success than the gentle appeal of Polly's singing was its political satire. The attitude of the eighteenth century towards satire was curious: when His Majesty's Government was attacked at all it was generally attacked in the most violent and scurrilous libels. To poke fun at it, as Gay did, was something new, and horrified some honest constitutional souls, who considered (or at any rate, publicly professed to consider) it was rank blasphemy to treat His Majesty's Government in anything but the most serious manner.

> When you censor the age
> Be cautious and sage,
> Lest the courtiers offended should be:
> If you mention vice or bribe,
> 'Tis so pat to all the tribe,
> Each cries, "That was levelled at me!"

wrote Gay, boldly ironical, for he knew that the audiences were ready enough to see personal satire none the less—probably might see more, even, than there was. And plenty of definite personal allusions there were: Robert Walpole, in particular, was attacked, especially in the character of Robin of Bagshot; but with true political cunning he turned the darts harmless away by leading the applause with the most evident relish—and by taking steps that nothing written by Mr. Gay, on at all the same model, should ever see the boards again.

Of course, like every success, the opera had its enemies, who objected to it not only on political grounds. There were many flutterings in the Italian Opera dovecots, and, which is the usual fate of moral satire, it was also attacked as conducive to immorality. " The detestableness of the entertainment, and its being adapted to the taste of the vulgar and set to easy tunes which almost everyone can remember, make the contagion spread the wilder," said the writer of a letter to the *Whitehall Evening Post*, 30th March 1728. In 1773, Sir John Fielding informed the Bench of Justices " that he had last year written to Mr. Garrick concerning the propriety of performing ' The Beggar's Opera,' which, he said, had never been represented on the stage without creating a number of real thieves." (Magistrates are a strangely recurrent type: one has heard the same thing said about the Cinema, surely ?) " He begged therefore the gentlemen present to join with him in requesting Mr. Garrick to desist from performing that Opera on Saturday evening." Needless to say, Mr. Garrick politely but firmly refused.

Dr. Johnson gave it as his opinion that " he did not believe that any man was ever made a rogue by being present at its representation "; and you will see here reproduced a programme found by my friend, Lady Talbot de Malahide,

THIS EVENING being WEDNESDAY,
The 6th of DECEMBER 1758,
A CONCERT of MUSIC.

Between the Parts of which will be preſented (Gratis)

THE BEGGAR'S OPERA.

Capt. Macheath, Mr. FITZMAURICE;
Peachum, Mr. LOVE;
Lockit, Mr. LANCASHIRE;
Filch, Mr. STAMPER.
Mat o' the Mint, Mr. PHILIPS.
Robin of Bagſhot, Mr. DAVENPORT;
Wat Dreary, Mr. HOLLAND;
Nimming Ned, Mr. ADAMSON;
Ben Budge, Mr. GATES;
Drawer, Maſter HAMILTON.

Polly, Mrs. MOZEEN;
Lucy, Mrs. LOVE;
Mrs. Peachum, Mrs. DAVENPORT.

To conclude with a Country Dance, by the Characters of the Opera.

To which will be added, a FARCE called

MISS IN HER TEENS.

Fribble, Mr. FITZMAURICE;
Flaſh, Mr. STAMPER.

Miſs Biddy, Mrs. MOZEEN;
Tag, Mrs. LOVE.

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ckets to be had at Mr. Millican's, the New Stage Office, at the Croſs, at the Exchange Coffee-houſe, and in the Area of the Concert Hall.

PIT and BOXES 2*s.* 6*d.* GALLERY 1*s.* 6*d.*

As Complaint has been made, that ſome of the Servants who are admitted *Gratis*, an Indulgence granted at no other Theatre, have abuſed that Indulgence, No given, that the leaſt Diſturbance hereafter, will occaſion an entire Excluſion.

CONCERT PROGRAMME OF "THE BEGGAR'S OPERA"

and very kindly given by her to me, carefully preserved among the papers of James Boswell, an ancestor of her husband. Gibbon went further: he even naïvely said that "it might refine the manners of highwaymen, make them less ferocious, more polite—in short, more like gentlemen." As Gay himself said in his preface, "Throughout the whole opera you may observe such a similitude of manners in high and low life that it is difficult to determine whether in the fashionable vices the fine gentlemen imitate the gentlemen of the road, or the gentlemen of the road the fine gentlemen." But whatever moralists might say, there could be no doubt that it hit the public taste. "What, Polly and the Pick-Pocket to-night!" wrote Goldsmith in 1760: "Polly and the Pick-Pocket to-morrow night—and Polly and the Pick-Pocket again! I want patience: I will hear no more!"

Pope tells us in a note to the "Dunciad" that "Ladies carried about with them the favourite songs of it in fans, and houses were furnished with it on screens." One might have taken this for an exaggeration, if it were not that one of these fans has recently actually come into my possession. So far as I know, or anybody else knows, it is the only one still in existence; and the owner, Mrs. Bradgate, most generously gave it to me towards the end of the run of the opera at Hammersmith, as a souvenir of the many happy evenings she was good enough to say she had spent there.

Hogarth, of course, did three pictures of scenes from it, and the Newgate one was engraved in 1760 by William Blake. Even Colley Cibber had at last to admit that it "skilfully gratify'd the publick taste."

Since then no really long period has ever passed without a revival of "The Beggar's Opera" in some form or another, though many of them were sad travesties of the original, and it was my good fortune to have the opportunity of re-

capturing its spirit. It was first published in 1765, and when copyright expired idiotic adapters were able to work their will on it: the part of Macheath became in revivals a favourite one for male and female impersonators, and by such, strange to say, the popularity of the opera was kept alive.

In one case, at any rate, this decadent method of acting opera brought retribution, though perhaps not on the right subject. The obituary of the *Gentlewoman's Magazine* (19th April 1782) contains the following: "Mrs. Fitzherbert, relict of the late Rev. Mr. F. of Northamptonshire—On the Wednesday evening before her death this lady went to Drury Lane Theatre in company with some friends, to see 'The Beggar's Opera.' On Mr. Bannister making his appearance in the character of Polly the whole audience were thrown into an uproar of laughter; unfortunately the actor's whimsical appearance had a fatal effect on Mrs. Fitzherbert; she could not suppress the laugh that seized her on the first view of this enormous representation; and before the second act was over she was obliged to leave the theatre. Mrs. F., not being able to banish the figure from her memory, was thrown into hysterics, which continued without intermission until Friday morning, when she expired."

This popularity waned, of course, in the nineteenth century: as someone said during that time, "The scruple of the present refined age may well hesitate to admit the moral pretensions of this work." Trust the nineteenth century for that! But it was revived in the West End in 1870 at the Gaiety (with a male impersonator, of course); and the last complete revival was at the Avenue (now the Playhouse) in 1886, with Sims Reeves as Macheath, though he, I am sorry to say, introduced much extraneous matter and sang songs that must have been grossly out of keeping with his character. The first act, however, was given—and very

charmingly given—in a sort of eighteenth-century revue at the Little Theatre in 1913 by Mr. Bertram Forsyth.

But we certainly thought that ours was the first performance of it in Hammersmith until we found that even there we had been anticipated; Mr. Horne, my manager, discovered a play-bill of a run of three weeks at the "New Theatre, Hammersmith," in 1783. No one now knows where the New Theatre was: apparently it opened its fortunes with "The Beggar's Opera," which it followed presently with "She Stoops to Conquer," but after that it was never heard of again.

It was not only in the way of length of run that "The Beggar's Opera" created an eighteenth-century record. Lavinia Fenton, as Polly, was the first actress to marry into the peerage; being carried off by the impatient Duke of Bolton when his first wife was still on her death-bed.

But Lavinia was not the only Polly who married into the peerage: indeed, it became almost a habit. Mary Catherine Bolton and Catherine Stephens, two successors in the part, both married into the peerage too. I feel it to be the one blot on our production that none of our Pollies now are duchesses, as they certainly richly deserve to be—quite as much as Lavinia and Mary and Catherine. Indeed, when I was persuading Miss Sylvia Nelis to play Polly—which she was at first, as I shall relate in the next chapter, modestly very unwilling to do—I pointed out the potentiality of marriage with a duke as one of the pickings of the part, so to speak. "They all did it," I cried in my enthusiasm, if not quite truthfully.

"But, my dear Mr. Playfair," said Miss Nelis, with the large-eyed seriousness of which she is eminently capable, "I can't marry a duke; I'm married to a dentist!"

And happily married to him, I'm sorry to say—for tradition's sake, if not for hers and his—she still remains.

It is, no doubt, the general opinion that " The Beggar's Opera " is a play of " the most revoltingly cynical order "; and it is a little difficult at first thinking to reconcile the delight which is taken in it by all sorts and conditions of people with the view of the critic who adds to this statement that " a play without a moral is, and never can be anything but, a monstrosity, as Shakespeare and all the great dramatists have always known." He thinks that the music is its redemption, and that without it would be unbearable.

I do not wish for one moment to detract from his praise of the music, but the conclusion that he comes to is surely a false one, and is unfair to the peculiar genius of Gay.

I believe it to be true that his *intention* was to write a merely cynical work; but even authors of genius are apt to be led away from their intentions.

What happened in Gay's case is very much what happened to Charles Dickens when he set out to write " The Pickwick Papers."

Pickwick in the early chapters is a mere butt. Polly at her first entrance is a mere wanton. But in both cases the authors conceived an affection for their subjects and they suffered a sea-change.

Polly, who directly she comes on the stage, speaks these lines:

" I know as well as any of the fine ladies how to make the most of myself and of my man, too. A woman knows how to be mercenary though she hath never been in a Court or an assembly. We have it in our natures, Papa."

is as different from the Polly of the touching later scenes of the Play as the Mr. Pickwick of the Smoking Concert at the Club is from the dear old gentleman in retirement. You will remember that anecdote of Lamb's (disinterred

with loving recurrence by Mr. E. V. Lucas, and not disdained by Sir James Barrie) about "cheerfulness breaking through." Somehow I feel that Mr. Gay, with every desire to be uncompromisingly atrocious, could not help allowing *Virtue* to break through, and optimism as well, in spite of himself. Incidentally the same is true of Mr. Congreve and his Millamant.

What is more cheerful to consider than the fact that, amongst the most hideous circumstances and surroundings, the fair flower of a disinterested love can be tended and flourish? And Polly's love for Macheath is disinterested to a fault. It is not ever disturbed by the fact that she has to share it, not only with Lucy but with at least four other doxies.

No: the dear old ladies who frequented our Wednesday matinees were not so abandoned as they bravely pretended to their nephews and nieces when they arrived safely home.

CHAPTER SIX

"The Beggar's Opera": New Style

The Record Office—Born of a Kitchen-Maid—Austin and the Music—Ranalow—The Book of the Words—Arnold Bennett as Colander—Austin under Lock and Key—Our Modest Polly—I Meet Lucy at Dinner—Sir Thomas—Lovat Fraser—His Marvellous Mechanics—Our Economics—The First Night—The Beggar's Opera Club—Success—We go to America—A Dismal Failure—A Galaxy of Pollies—Mr. Austin takes up the Pen.

VI

I RECOLLECT a story (which I hope is not apochryphal) of a young man who came to London in the later years of Queen Victoria's reign. He was still a little weary after the effort it had cost him to win fourth-class honours in jurisprudence at Oxford; and—a zealous amateur of the cinder path—at first the sterner pavements he was called upon to tread around the Temple and Lincoln's Inn depressed him exceedingly. Shortly, however, after his arrival, a friend of his, surfeited with an older year of dinners, proposed a stroll around the environs. He pointed out to him the "Cheshire Cheese"; and in their youth and enthusiasm they did its bar full honour. Then they turned westward, and encountered a large and imposing building, obviously just completed. "And what is that?" inquired our verdant friend. "The Record Office," replied the Wiser. "Oh, indeed," said he, "I must remember that. I might often want to be reminded how far C. B. Fry actually *did* jump in the last Varsity sports!"

Except that I am sure he never would have needed such reminding I should like to believe that the hero of this little tale was Mr. "Plum" Warner.

So, to save a fruitless journey to Chancery Lane, I will set out the facts regarding the run of "The Beggar's Opera" at the beginning of this chapter.

Further statistics I will leave to more distinguished natural philosophers than myself; but even with its past history this must be admitted to be psychologically a very queer achievement.

And let me state at once officially and categorically (for there have been Lambert Simnels and Perkin Warbecks in

the field), that the sole originator of the notion of my revival was a kitchenmaid whose name, with blazing infidelity, I have forgotten. She taught me the words and the music and the business of " Over the Hills and Far Away " when I was five years old; and, consciously or sub-consciously, ever since those distant days I have been determined to acquire a knowledge of the rest of the play, and share it with as many of my fellow citizens as I could induce to join me.

More immediately, however, a momentary interruption in Sir Thomas Beecham's career was the cause.

" 'Twas in the prime of summer-time, an evening calm and cool," (not to say infernally wet and chilly), when Frederic Austin was good enough to come, as was his frequent wont, and take a dish of tea and a couple of fly biscuits in my luxurious (if somewhat draughty) office. He gave me the tragic information that a reputable opera company was out of a job—and likely to remain so for some time. I answered that an equally respected theatre was also likely to be shortly disengaged. I don't know whether we discussed the possibility of diminishing " Boris Goudonov " or " Tannhäuser " to the capacities of a theatre which can dress twelve people with difficulty and give bowing room to an orchestra of fourteen at a pinch; but at any rate " The Beggar's Opera " came to the surface in the course of our conversation, and he jumped at the idea.

So I routed a dusty copy out of my cupboard: we rushed to the wreck of what had once been a piano, and he proceeded to play to me the melodies arranged by the good Pepusch with figured basses and all. " Over the Hills and Far Away " soon came out very much as I suspected it would. " If the Heart of a Man is depressed with Care " recalled to me distant thoughts of the kitchen lancers of my youth. The rest of the music, I must confess, suggested a

series of Low Church hymn-tunes—the sort of hymn-tunes which make a man feel when he attempts to sing them that he must be suffering from incipient tonsilitis—but Austin cared for none of these things.

"You wait," he cried, "till I have quickened up what Pepusch designed to be slow, till I have harmonized him out of all knowledge, and harnessed a string quartette and a harpsichord, and a something de Gamba, and a what-d'you-call-it d'amore to their tasks. . . .!"

I had a touching faith (which, strangely enough, I still retain) in the transmogrifying powers of Frederic Austin; and I believed him. I am going to let him say in his own words something about the music of "The Beggar's Opera"; so I will leave what is always rather a risky subject for me alone at the moment, and proceed to other considerations.

It is of world-shaking importance, of course, to get my chronology correct; and I think that the second factor in the undertaking was Frederick Ranalow. Somehow, even when I was producing "The Marriage of Figaro" for Sir Thomas, there flashed across my mind more than once that Ranalow was born to play Macheath; and so convinced was I of it when Austin and I were talking that I swept aside with ruthlessness his timid suggestion that opera tradition, Pepusch, the claims of harmony and other nuisances, demanded a tenor voice for the dashing hero—and you will agree with me that I was splendidly right.

At any rate, without a moment's delay he was summoned to join our conclave. The notions which he cherished in regard to a weekly salary were airily dismissed. Standing with my back to the window (so excluding some of the unwelcome wild North-Easter), I proclaimed firmly that we were well in the middle of the dog days, and the call of the hedgerows and other summer delights would prevent all but a very few enthusiasts from coming to our theatre, sing

he never so attractively. Something in the nature of a percentage which should begin to soar in the realms of the unlikely was suggested to him. Ranalow was bewildered, but good-naturedly acquiescent.

The next thing to be tackled was the Book of the Words, and I undertook, on behalf of the other interested parties, the herculean task of reading it through—a task which, I can assure you, took a great deal of faith, hope, and trust in the judgment of critics dead and gone (but a great deal wiser than myself). For to tell you the truth, to people who are in the habit of keeping themselves alive on a light diet, "The Beggar's Opera" swallowed at one sitting, just as Gay wrote it, is a pretty indigestible dish ! I can claim the merit of recognizing its plums; but I came very often very near to being choked by its suet. I'm not quite sure what a colander is, but I felt that some such implement must be wielded at once to reduce its density; and this function I decided to entrust to Arnold Bennett. I am happy to say that he saw very quickly how it could be done; and more readily than I did, I think, he recognized the splendid quality of Gay's work. At any rate, within a couple of days "The Beggar's Opera" had been analysed, dissected, and put together again by him, and we had a version ready to be put to the test of rehearsal.

Austin was locked up in a room (without, I am afraid, the two bottles of claret and the plate of anchovy sandwiches which Sheridan enjoyed in a similar situation) to complete his musical arrangement. And from that room during the rehearsals proceeded at intervals his score. Nellie Chaplin and her sisters and the orchestra worked with us; for it is to be noted that from the first conception of the production to the first performance there was only possible an interval of five weeks !

My next step was to secure the rest of the cast; and here

again I had largely recourse to the members of Sir Thomas Beecham's Company. Peachum was to be played by Frederic Austin himself. How he ever managed to learn his part and rehearse and write his music at the same time is, as I look back upon it, simply the eighth wonder of the world ! But somehow it was done—and as I write he is still very much alive, and working, if anything, a little harder still. Indeed, that is really the only very grave complaint I have against him, for I always find that when those friends with whom one is in constant touch work too hard it is almost as fatiguing to oneself as to them !—He is, however, not selfish in other ways, so I will let this pass.

Of my interview with Miss Sylvia Nelis, whom I was absolutely determined to see, and no other, as "Polly," I have already recounted one little anecdote. She required a great deal of persuasion. She assured me over and over again that though she could sing a little sometimes, she was an entirely incapable actress, and that the presence of an audience terrified her beyond measure. I shortly discovered, however, that what she meant by not being able to act was not being able to indulge in all the preposterous antics which are usually known as acting on the Grand Operatic Stage; and as for being terrified by an audience, she proceeded to contradict what she had said by giving *me* an entrancingly amusing exhibition of them—with eyes cast up to heaven, and her arms extended in an agony of expectation. I assured her that she would be severely reprimanded if she attempted to do any of these things or indulge in any of that sort of acting as "Polly" in "The Beggar's Opera !" Indeed, I told her that she would scarcely ever have to move at all, and that her head could always be held modestly downwards. At last, to my joy, she relented; and if there is nothing else to my credit I can at least claim to have given the world an example of one perfect piece of casting, for I cannot believe

that Lavinia Fenton, even, can ever have been better than Sylvia Nelis at her best.

From the Beecham Opera Company came also Wynn, our first " Lockit "; and Alfred Heather, born, so I think, to play " Filch "—and born to keep us all amused and optimistic when rehearsals seemed likely to become a little too strenuous.

Violet Marquesita, who played " Lucy," Providence very politely arranged to place next to me at a dinner party within a day or two of our deciding to produce the play. She was so obviously " Lucy " that I think that I opened the subject of " The Beggar's Opera " with the soup and settled her contract before the removal of the fish.

But perhaps the most unexpected find of all was Miss Elsie French. Miss Elsie French is a young Irish lady who for some years had played " principal boy " in provincial pantomimes at Christmas time, and during the rest of the year had executed sailors' hornpipes and such other delights in touring revues. She came to see me, I think, first when we were just going to put on " John Ferguson," and told me that she had a great desire to gratify more legitimate ambitions. I think it was merely because she happened to arrive at that particular moment, and because she was bright and had a kind face, that I engaged her to understudy Miss Maire O'Neill. I could only guess what her talents might really be; but she had an opportunity of playing the part once or twice, and played it extremely well. All the same, I hadn't originally the remotest intention of entrusting " Mrs. Peachum " to her. I engaged her to continue understudying, but designed that part for Miss Rosina Filippi. Miss Filippi, however, though very kindly willing to help, as she always is, was so busy with her classes that she said she could only come to a limited number of rehearsals; and I felt that in this particular play such an arrangement could never be

MRS. PEACHUM : DESIGN BY CLAUD LOVAT FRASER FOR "THE BEGGAR'S OPERA"

satisfactory. But, while I was looking round for somebody else, Miss French was reading the part, and I soon discovered, to my joy, that it was unnecessary to look any further.

The "Ladies of the Town" all appeared miraculously at auditions which we held in spare moments during the first few days of rehearsals. I only recall an amusing adventure with regard to Miss Nonny Lock, our lovely and graceful "Jenny Diver." I was asked by a lady whose name I have forgotten to witness a class of her pupils, who performed a sort of impromptu play in which all their talents were to be shown off to the best advantage. Among them was Miss Nonny Lock. I was at once struck with her particular charm, and offered her the part. It afterwards appeared that she had been on the stage from childhood, and had only taken the part in which I saw her at the last moment in the place of a real pupil who had fallen ill!

Of the actual rehearsals, I am afraid I can recall very little. The particular method of the delivery of the words and the songs (of which our constant audiences have been good enough to approve) were merely a deduction from the pictures of that period and the period that followed—largely, of course, Hogarths and Zoffanies. How far it approximated to the methods of the original production it is impossible for me to say, nor do I think it a matter of very great moment. One is out, I maintain, in reproducing old plays not so much to give a replica (which is impossible) as to furnish a sort of review and criticism—a *parody* if you like, but a parody which expresses admiration and not contempt.

I must tell you, in passing, that Sir Thomas Beecham himself of his own free will came to nearly all our rehearsals, and gave me every sort of help and encouragement. It is no little tribute to his powers of self-sacrifice in the cause of English music that he, who loves the good things of life,

was usually to be found that summer lunching off toasted cheese and a mug of beer in the refreshment rooms of the Metropolitan Railway Station at Hammersmith !

And now I come to Lovat Fraser. There was, of course, no question, quite apart from the fact of his love for the Lyric, Hammersmith, but that he should design the scenery and dresses; and I am glad to doubt if anything in his life could have given him greater happiness than this opportunity. It was the period which he adored. He had a vast knowledge of its life and of its literature—far greater, indeed, than any that I could ever pretend to. He not only knew " The Beggar's Opera " intimately, but there was hardly a play of the eighteenth century which he had not read and did not remember. For many of them, indeed, he had completed elaborate designs without any hope that they would be seen upon the stage. I don't think that he had done this in regard to " The Beggar's Opera ": but I knew (or thought) it would give him no difficulties. Nor, in a sense, did it; but both of us in our enthusiasm failed to face from the beginning the economic question. When it did come to be faced it caused much heart-searching and turmoil. But from the ashes of all his beautiful original designs, which were destroyed a fortnight before the actual date of the production of " The Beggar's Opera " arose that method (of providing a background of scenery suitable in form for all revivals of classical plays) which has created something of a revolution in the English Theatre, and has given new pride and new hope to those who work for and believe in it. Don't let me be misunderstood. Lovat was much too skilled a craftsman to design anything that was unworkable, or, even from a pictorial point of view, unsuitable for our small stage; but the scenery which he originally produced for " The Beggar's Opera " was comparatively elaborate, and could only be used with the help of a very

large stage staff, and it required great skill and long hours of labour in its building.

Meanwhile the situation of our syndicate was precarious. Our capital was always small, and lately we had suffered losses, and our board had wisely passed a pious resolution that the total expenditure on the production of "The Beggar's Opera" was to be so much, and unless it could be done for that sum it was not to be done at all. Luckily at that moment I was able to think of a means of doubling the "so much," but if I were to use Lovat's designs it would have to be quadrupled.

The doubling was done in this way. Money for our sort of theatrical enterprises is, as I have explained before, exceedingly difficult to come by. There is only one *easy* method by which it can be obtained, and that is from those authors (and more especially authoresses)—descendants, no doubt, of the dear old ladies and gentlemen who in the literary 'eighties used to publish their effusions in the advertisement columns of the morning papers—thus finding their only means of unnecessary self-expression—who are willing to put large sums of money at the service of anyone who will produce their plays. There are even actors and actresses of independent means who are willing to do the same. But that is a method which I have always firmly rejected, and hope always shall.

But it so happened that I had been very much struck by the capacity as a dancing teacher in an amateur performance of a young lady called Miss Marion Wilson, aged then, I think, about sixteen years. Her father, a wealthy business man, told me that she had a great ambition to make for herself a career in that direction; and either then or at some previous time he was good enough to tell me that he and his wife had so much enjoyed their frequent visits to Hammersmith that he would be very glad to help me financially

whenever I needed it. I can say with a clear conscience that when I engaged Miss Wilson to supervise the dances in "The Beggar's Opera" I had no thought whatever of this suggestion in my mind; but later it occurred to me that I might make use of it. Mr. Wilson was as good as his word, and agreed to take the risk of "The Beggar's Opera" in equal partnership with our syndicate; such risks, however, to be limited, if I remember rightly, to £2,000 on each side. High finance is not my subject, nor would I discuss it at all if it were not for the legends which have sprung up about the fortunes beyond the dreams of avarice which Miss Marion Wilson is reputed to have made over "The Beggar's Opera"; and because it gives me, I hope, the graceful opportunity of thanking her for what she did. As a matter of fact, I may state, I think quite accurately, that up to the time of writing, Miss Wilson, risking £2,000—but her father putting down actually only £500 on her behalf—has made a profit of £17,000. But there is, of course, I hope and believe, more to come in the future. The adventure is pale by the light of "Charley's Aunt" or "Chu Chin Chow"; but for the revival of a classic at a suburban theatre the result is not so bad.

To return to Lovat Fraser. His original sketches (which for the purposes of allegory I have reduced to ashes, though, as a matter of fact, I think they are still in the possession of Grace, his wife), I will not attempt to describe. I only know that at the time I thought them perfection. But they wouldn't do, and I had to tell him. I did it very bluntly. It was the only way. I remember quite well even the words I used. I said: "Lovat, the whole damn thing has got to be done somehow in one scene, and you've got to produce that scene by to-morrow morning." I know his face went white, and I know his voice went husky, for he was a pretty tired man even then, but he only said: "All right." I think it was at

one o'clock the next morning he rang me up and said: "I've found the way," and I knew by the sound of his voice that it would be all right indeed. I hope I was not conscious of having set him an impossible task. I think I had brought him myself a sort of ground plan which would make the thing work: but to him alone is due all the credit of the ingenious idea, of the model which suggests (though it makes no attempt realistically to reproduce) eighteenth-century architecture, and of the little gadgets and hangings which make the model change from an exterior to an interior at will. (You will see it reproduced in one of our illustrations; but those people who are really fond of these things should pay a visit to the theatre-room in the South Kensington Museum, where an excellent scale model is exhibited. The chandelier, by the way, was suggested and designed by Gordon Craig, who happened to be paying one of his rare visits to England while the rehearsals of "The Beggar's Opera" were proceeding, and who, I believe, so long as he stayed here, came to every single performance—and to anyone who knows Gordon Craig's general attitude towards the theatre, that is no small compliment.)

Just as I cannot (and, fortunately, I think it is unnecessary) describe the scenery in detail, so I cannot appraise the design and colours used in the costumes. They were chosen deliberately by Lovat to represent a period a little earlier than that of the original production of the play, partly because he found that period more attractive from the designer's point of view, but also because the incidents and characters described belong to a time that Gay well remembered but had already passed when he was writing it. It is also to be remembered that the finery worn by the ladies and gentlemen in the play was finery stolen and somewhat tattered, and that in those days dresses, and especially men's dresses, though they cost more, were worn and serviceable

for a far longer period than those of modern times. These dresses were all carried out by the firm of which Mr. Charles Wilson is the head, though to them the making of anything but the latest creations was an entirely new experience. They had the advantage, however, of the active help of Mrs. Lovat Fraser, who has a particular genius for this kind of work, which she has since continued to turn to full account. Indeed, all the dresses in " The Duenna " have been carried out by the firm of which she is now senior partner, and under her direction.

It seemed as the production grew nearer, rather to my surprise, that many people were good enough to share in our excited anticipation of its results; and at any rate, for two or three days the papers were full of articles giving histories of the previous career of the play, and there were many prophecies of a triumph to come—so much so that I began to feel extremely uncomfortable in case a disappointment might be in store for them and for me !

For one thing, the task of interpreting the play was really an extremely difficult one. It bore no relation to anything that had been attempted before, at any rate in our time. Both the jokes and the words of the songs were extremely difficult to " get over," as the phrase is.

Then again, most of the singers were accustomed to the methods and conventions of acting used in opera and musical comedy; and all these had to be unlearnt. Opera singers, as a rule, are very good at singing when they speak, but very bad at speaking when they sing, if you understand what I mean. And, as I have said before, they have a hundred good reasons for explaining why, when they sing, the words cannot (sometimes they go as far as saying ought not to) be heard. Of this entirely false belief, which Mr. Plunket Greene has done much to expose, I was determined to disabuse them; though my very slight knowledge of the art of

A TAVERN NEAR NEWGATE : DESIGN BY CLAUD LOVAT FRASER FOR "THE BEGGAR'S OPERA"

singing provided me only with a very blunt knife to cut through the wire entanglements of their defence. Then again, I find many singers have an inborn prejudice against performing a cadenza lying down or kneeling, or with their back to the audience, or in whatever position I felt it was necessary to place them. But this particular company was very kind and very patient, and took my word with a touching trust when I assured them that all things were possible with faith. All the same, I went through many moments of despair, a despair which reached its nadir on the occasion of the last dress rehearsal. I believe then that I really came to the conclusion that the whole production was merely an affected piece of dullness.

The night of the first performance arrived: and on our past reputation we were able to welcome a really brilliant audience. Almost at the last moment we had given up, very wisely, our first idea of having no conductor for our small orchestra; and Eugene Goossens very kindly consented to take the chair for awhile. I must confess now that during the greater part of the first act I thought that my gloomiest fears might be realized. The audience seemed indeed to think it "a quaint pretty thing," but it went along entirely without any of that excitement which spells success, and it was not till Ranalow and Miss Nelis sang their two duets that there was any real response: so that (if I may say so without boasting) it seemed as if it were the *introducers* of Gay who made the success, such as it was—I mean Lovat Fraser, Austin, and my humble self—not Mr. Gay. And I dare say this because, after the first few weeks and for the rest of the run, the situation—no doubt owing to the actors having improved out of all knowledge their method of delivery—completely changed. With the large popular audiences which then began to throng the Lyric, even though they appreciated (as I'm sure they did) the scenery

and dresses, the music, and the methods of production, it was the actual play of Gay himself, and the words of the dialogue and the songs which won their particular affection.

I have never heard this theory advanced in so many words by anybody. I can only say that " I saw it in the faces of them " . . . perhaps the members of " The Beggar's Opera " Club could tell me whether I am right or wrong. " The Beggar's Opera " Club was a mysterious institution composed, I think, entirely of frequenters of the gallery. Whether they had any other meeting-place besides that luxurious part of our theatre I cannot say; nor can I recollect any of their rules, though I believe the principal one was that no one was eligible for membership unless he or she had sat through the play thirty times. I confess with shame that I am ineligible myself—unless eclectically !

Though the criticisms in the newspapers were almost universally appreciative to the point of enthusiasm, so much so that a violent condemnation in an undergraduate paper at Cambridge came almost as a welcome relief, the affair was by no means the immediate success that, for instance, " The Way of the World " was. Of course, it is possible that the time of year had a good deal to do with this; but a good many people found that only on a second visit could they thoroughly appreciate its particular flavour. But by the middle of the autumn we had arrived at that happy state when an empty seat in any part of the house was a rarity. And I personally, ingrate that I am, was beginning to fear that Mr. Gay and his infernal opera was to be the sole topic of conversation which I should ever be called upon to enjoy; and if there is a thing which I really hate talking about when I go out, it is the theatre and anything to do with it. I spend on an average twelve hours a day within its walls, and when I do escape I like to talk about things of which my know-

ledge is scanty, like Baroque Architecture, and Einstein and Prisoner's Base.

The effect of this particular revival of "The Beggar's Opera" on society generally was certainly as great, even taking into account the increase in population, as it was in the original production. If the music was no more printed upon fans, it was played upon every pier. Largely owing to its influence, I think, ladies' fringes almost entirely disappeared and panniers appeared beneath their evening skirts. I don't know that there was actually any increase in the number of convictions for highway robbery; but then, that picturesque amusement is unfortunately already almost extinct beyond resurrection. Very shortly no less than three touring companies were playing our version in the provinces, and there were others playing, as of course they had every right to do, versions of their own. Somehow none of these achieved any very satisfactory result, partly because the production was designed for a theatre of a particular size, and still more because the casting of the play is an almost insurmountably difficult business; as is the playing of Mr. Austin's score by an unaccustomed orchestra.

No company was sent out to risk yellow fever, if yellow fever still survives, in the West Indies; but at the invitation of a great enthusiast, Mr. Duff, I myself took out a company, to which Miss Nelis, Mr. Heather, and Mr. Wynn were temporarily lent, to produce the play in New York. There, alas! it was not a success.

I remember when I stepped ashore into that vast shed which is the common entrance to America, Stephen Thomas (who has been, since the beginning of things, and still is, my right-hand man and stage manager, and combines enthusiasm and extreme pessimism in an extraordinary degree) received me with these affecting words: "I say, I don't think this is our place." It certainly wasn't. I had received

many tips from my friends who had visited America before me as to how I was to deal with the cohort of reporters who would meet me pencil in hand, all agog to learn my apologia for the theatre of which I was the proud and titular head. They were unnecessary. I had the unique experience of setting foot in America and returning to my own country without seeing as much as one of them.

Exactly what was the cause of the total failure of " The Beggar's Opera " in New York to attract the attention which many people would say it was good enough to deserve I cannot say. For one thing, Mr. Duff and his associates perhaps strove too meticulously to make an exact repetition of its circumstances in this country. It was, so they said, to make in New York an exactly similar appearance and success. It was to be produced unheralded at a theatre comparable in size and distance from Broadway to the size of the Lyric, Hammersmith, and its distance from Piccadilly. The *élite* of New York society was to travel for their pleasure. They did not. The first night, though the performance was excellent, made no impression whatever on its audience; and, in spite of the very kind notices in the papers and a few devoted adherents, that lack of impression remained. I sat in front in a half-empty house simply bewildered by the fact that the jokes and songs which evoked such thunders of applause at Hammersmith passed in New York practically unnoticed. Poor Lovat had been rated by me soundly for his extravagance in subscribing to an American Press Cutting Association for the event; but I don't think a single paper mentioned his name in connection with the scenery—though they have learnt to appreciate his art since. A few days afterwards I returned to England with my head bloody but I hope unbowed, feeling a very lesser Columbus. It may be that some other production of mine will please them better. I hope so indeed, for I cherish an intense admiration for that theatre-

proud nation. I should add that Mr. Duff himself remained completely undaunted—that he continued to tour "The Beggar's Opera" all over America for nearly three years, and I believe in some towns other than New York it did meet with a greater appreciation. All the same, I believe it to be true that "The Beggar's Opera" will never be greeted as it should be except in the town of its origin.

Its fate in Australia was very similar to that in America, though the representative of the Australian firm which undertook its production prophesied confidently to the contrary. And yet it is curious but true that both American and Australian visitors when they saw it over here seemed to appreciate its merits to the full. In any case, however much I may endeavour to explain its failure, I make and feel no complaint. I only feel sorry for the disappointment of so many people who felt it might be otherwise.

In the course of its run in London the cast naturally and inevitably underwent many changes, though one Gentleman of the Road actually had the distinction of never missing a single performance. Mr. Ranalow, Miss French, and Miss Marquesita played throughout the run with occasional holidays, and all three acted with as much spirit on the last night as they did on the first. The place of Mr. Austin, who after Mr. Goossens' departure succeeded to the conductorship of the orchestra, was taken first by Mr. Wynn, and then, with tremendous popularity, by Mr. Scott Russell. There were many "Pollies," all charming; and principally Miss Katharine Arkandy, and Miss Kathlyn Hilliard. If before the production I had been asked whether the standard of acting could have been kept up for so long a period as three years I should have deemed it utterly impossible; but with every desire to be severely critical, I believe it was the case.

One distinguished lady didn't think so, and I may be

forgiven for printing an extract from an article by her in the *Daily Telegraph* and my reply.

Dame Ethel Smyth is always delightful, but sometimes in the wrong, as I sincerely believe in this case she was:

"One knows exactly how these inordinate runs come about. B. boasts he has heard the thing six times; not to be outdone, C. makes it seven, and as the weeks roll by, the audience, sunk in a self-induced hypnotic trance, does not notice what was once—in the case of 'The Beggar's Opera' at least—an exquisite outline of crisp good taste is now blurred and coarsened beyond recognition, the performers a prey to over-emphasis, the conductor yielding encore after encore to a single hand-clap, and, as final touch of degradation, the audience singing with the performers! In short, an orgy of spiritual Mafeking."

"Sir,—I love romancing better than facts. I also love Dame Ethel Smyth, and I hope she will accept this only intimation. But, as a tribute to the loyalty of my company, I cannot allow her statement that the performance of 'The Beggar's Opera' is 'blurred and coarsened beyond recognition' to go unchallenged. If it is true, it must also be true that my eyes are blurred and my powers of criticism atrophied. It is a constant wonder to me that the standard of performance has been so well sustained. Never to my knowledge have the audience joined in the singing, though I should not mind in the least if they did. Where is the degradation? I dislike myself both hand-clapping and encores, but we must reckon with human nature both before and behind the proscenium arch. And human nature has done more for music than all the theories of all the writers who busy themselves qualifying for a place in future editions of 'Grove's Dictionary of Music.'

"May I suggest ever so delicately that Dame Ethel Smyth has perhaps been prejudiced by her often-expressed

desire that an opera of hers should follow 'The Beggar's Opera,' and her often-expressed conviction that it would be sure to have a good run, in both of which I share?"

All the same, I have no ambition to produce another play destined to run for so long—a lack of ambition which I am sure is comparatively easily realizable! For one thing, three and a half years into what remains to me of a working life "won't go" very often, and I have still, I am glad to say, many different kinds of plays on which I am anxious to experiment. I am perfectly aware that the production of "The Beggar's Opera" is very much in the nature of an achievement in miniature, but on its small scale it does represent something which is essentially of England, and England proving its claim to have possessed great artists, and as such I have some right, I think, to be proud of it.

I will now give place for the moment to Mr. Austin.

A NOTE BY FREDERIC AUSTIN

My association with the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, almost casually begun through Nigel Playfair in the early summer of 1920, has resulted in my responsibility for the music of "The Beggar's Opera" and its sequel "Polly" (originally intended for Hammersmith), "The Knight of the Burning Pestle" (written for Bronson Albery, but instigated by Playfair and produced by him for Albery at the Kingsway Theatre), "The Insect Play" (written for the Hammersmith Syndicate's tenancy of what is now the Regent Theatre, and was the Euston Theatre of Varieties—a transformation effected by them), and "The Way of the World." I have been asked to say something of my particular share in these productions, for the purposes of the present book, even to the extent of touching—lightly perhaps—upon certain technicalities that may

be generally interesting. In the hope of that possibility I proceed.

When it was decided that " The Beggar's Opera " should be prepared for production, both Playfair and myself proceeded much as though shot from a bow. Both of us had associations that gave us the necessary impulse, both an equal enthusiasm for the material that lay to our hands. For myself, the liberal and uncensored reading of my early youth (uncensored perhaps because of some ignorance on the part of my elders as to the omnivorous character of my appetite for anything contained between two book-covers, and of the particular character of the possibly half-forgotten and curious books, pictures, caricatures that I discovered in odd corners of dusky shelves), had given me a tolerable knowledge of the ways of the eighteenth century. But of all books, the name of Peachum lit up for me the one that I used to read with fascinated horror—illustrated too, as I seem to remember, by some master of the sordid and terrible—the Newgate Calendar.

On the musical side—a breath of air—as a student I had known " The Beggar's Opera " as one of the earliest examples of ballad-opera, and many of its tunes had been familiar to me since childhood. In that childhood indeed was planted the real seed of the matter. Did I not know Matthew Locke's music to " Macbeth," for instance, with its picture of the three witches on the cover, from the days of my earliest strummings on the old-fashioned piano with its silken-pleated front ? What, too, was that large oblong book of psalm and hymn-tunes with the impossible trills and twirls in the melody ? And that other book, with its very brown and faded pages containing the " Tune from the time of James II," the daintiness and charm of which still gives me so much pleasure—that, and so many others ? Add to such influences a very thorough early training in strict counter-

point and in the ways of the older classical composers, and my "dispositions" towards "arranging and composing" the Hammersmith version of "The Beggar's Opera" were practically complete.

The original music of it is unfamiliar to most people, but the curious in such matters may be recommended to a facsimile reprint of both words and music, now issued by Chapman and Dodd. A comparison of this with the published vocal score of my own version will serve better than words to show in detail the extent and character of the work for which I am responsible. To give a brief outline of the matter, the original music consisted of an overture and some seventy traditional and contemporary tunes, to which Gay wrote words of his own. These tunes, of an average length of about sixteen bars, are printed in the earliest editions (from two of which I worked), with the voice part and bass only—the basses having been added by Dr. Pepusch, a German musician settled in England, and at the time of his collaboration with Gay, of considerable reputation. The overture (written in the earlier eighteenth-century manner upon the old tune of "The Happy Clown") is also generally attributed to him (probably correctly, in spite of the fact that in a later published version of the opera it stands as the work of Dr. Arne, the only difference being the addition of the continual shakes and florid melodic ornaments then coming into fashion). It seems to have been the habit of the composers of those days, however, freely to annex the work of others without acknowledgment, a process not disdained by the redoubtable Handel himself. Indeed, the prevalent freedom in this respect and the absence of any remedy, were largely responsible for the variety and excellence of the airs of "The Beggar's Opera," for wherever a good tune was found, new or old, it was straightway made an ingredient in the general "potpourri."

It is usually supposed that these tunes were chosen by Dr. Pepusch, but it is interesting to conjecture as to whether Gay had not a hand in the business. Pepusch would naturally have had a good knowledge of the works of his contemporaries and possibly of earlier English composers, but Gay, who is said to have played the flute and to have had " a good ear for a tune " may well have been better acquainted with the many native traditional and folk-tunes with which the score is generously studded. However, Mr. Playfair has touched on this point.

In treating this material, it would have been possible to take it as it stood, filling in the harmonies indicated by the basses of Dr. Pepusch, to score the music accordingly and to present a version that would have been more or less historically accurate. I decided however that though such a process might be interesting to the antiquary, to others the result would be tiresome and ineffective. The tunes were, for the most part, disconcertingly short (and in all but one or two cases Gay wrote but single verses for each song), and the basses given were often heavy and awkward, often too, particularly in the folk-tunes, disguising the intrinsic character of the melodies. I therefore discarded the basses and used the tunes as raw material for what is, in effect, a new work made on the general plan of the old one; and while keeping the atmosphere of the play and the period always before me, did what I could to make the musical interest sufficiently sustained and vivid for present purposes, adding where necessary to the original length of the various numbers, here and there turning solos into duets or more extended concerted pieces, inserting dances, instrumental interludes, and so on.

It occurred to me also that it would be interesting to use the harpsichord and the " gamboys " once again in the orchestra, and with that thought I remembered those

indefatigable propagandists of ancient music, the Misses Chaplin. They duly became the nucleus of the Hammersmith orchestra, giving me my harpsichord and, when suitable opportunity occurred, the Viola d'Amore and Viola da Gamba. So was the music "arranged" (as the term goes) "and composed," and in similar fashion, that of "Polly," its sequel.

The music to "The Knight of the Burning Pestle" was more composed than arranged, for the original material still in existence is exceedingly slight; but this time my essay was in the Elizabethan manner, again, however, with latitude in its application. With "The Insect Play" I had the opportunity of putting off the old-world garments that I had worn for so long—garments that with all their possible picturesqueness are apt to develop into something of the "strait-waistcoat"—and very much aided and abetted by Playfair, who encouraged a much more detailed and extensive musical scheme than is usual, I thoroughly enjoyed the stretch of my limbs into the normal freedom of a contemporary idiom. Indeed, my liberty was something more than normal, for the demands of the play itself, powerful and imaginative, a play of which we surely have not heard the last, certainly passed considerably beyond such a definition.

With the writing of the music to "The Way of the World," and in it the return to earlier habit, my catalogue ends. In the background, however, there is another work, suggested by Playfair and written for Hammersmith in conjunction with John Drinkwater; a ballad-opera on the subject of Robert Burns, at the moment awaiting its public baptism. With it, too, are various scattered beginning projects as yet unrealized, small things here and there that may one day come to light and that owe their genesis to the same happy associations with Playfair and the Lyric Theatre. As

for him, although, unlike Gay, he doesn't play the flute as far as I am aware, yet, like him, he certainly has "a good ear for a tune," be that ancient or modern, and seems never so happy as when his productions demand one, or when he can by some extension of possibility stretch them to that point.

CHAPTER SEVEN

My Principles Reviewed

An Invitation—A Theatre with a Pose?—The Poor, Tired Business Man—A Seven-and-Sixpenny Bottle of Lethe—Not a National Affair—The Nature of Playgoers—My Slogan: "Recreation with Exercise"—Gordon Craig—The Functions of a Producer—Elimination—Coagulation—Choosing a Play—Rehearsing—Scenery and Lighting and Dresses—A Letter about Sugar-Basins—The Play as a Whole—Down with the Stars—A "Gallic" Mind—My Choice of Plays.

VII

. . . . . College
Camford.

Dear Nigel, *Oct.* 189...

Will you have breakfast with me on Friday and bring some actresses ?

Yours,

Nigel Playfair, Esq. . . . . .
The . . . . . Girl Co.
. . . . . Theatre, Camford.

I rescue this exciting letter from oblivion partly because it amuses me to think that its author is now a shareholder in our Syndicate and also, if not consequently, a Director of the Bank of England, and especially because it does typify a certain attitude of mind towards the theatre which even now is only just moribund. Thirty years ago it was an attitude which would radiate even at breakfast—fearful thought. What little share the Lyric, Hammersmith, has taken in its assassination I will endeavour to explain.

Incidentally I feel I must apologise, as an actor, for publicly exposing the fact that I cherish " principles " which involve a certain movement of mental processes. The apology is perhaps not so necessary now as it used to be. Twenty years ago, at any rate, Thought was considered to be a very dangerous symptom in a gentleman of my Profession. I remember well that in that period I was sharing a dressing-room with a well-known " character " comedian, and my behaviour troubled him exceedingly, so much so that he deemed it advisable to consult the Manager who employed us. " I say," said he, " is that young Playfair at all——"

and he tapped his forehead once or twice significantly. " Not that I know of," replied the Manager, " why ? "

" Well," said my friend, " do you know sometimes he'll sit in the dressing-room half the evening without saying a d——d word and read a b—— book ! "

A most respectable critic (who may be forgiven since he had previously spilt his horn of praise over me) has written of the Lyric, Hammersmith, that it is a *Theatre with a Pose*, and at this stage of the book it would be as well if I paused a little to examine into the truth of this definition —to accept it with reservations, perhaps, and even to defend my pose.

The entertainments that I offer are designed to minister to the needs of those people who believe in combining recreation with exercise: in this case, since their sitting position and the general good demands it, exercise of the mind rather than of the body. Indeed, the seats that I offer them (and from my friends in the gallery I seem to hear a pained chorus of " Yes, indeed ! " as I write) are inducive to " attention," almost in the full military significance of the word.

Now, we are frequently invited, especially by the Sporting Press, to acknowledge that the theatre is a place for " the poor, tired business man ": a place where fagged men and women may go to rest body and mind alike in a gentle and narcotic titillation of their senses—where they may forget the horrid problems of their daily work—in short, to admit that to go to the theatre should be another and slightly more respectable method of looking

> Into the pewter pot
> To see the world as the world's not.

I am horrid enough to answer that I admit nothing of the kind. On the contrary, I think the theatre should be a stimulant of energy, not an anodyne: a place, not where life's

problems can be forgotten—a seven-and-sixpenny bottle of Lethe—but a place where they may be intensified conveniently by concentration. Moreover, I maintain that this point of view is not merely that of a few cranks: I even go so far as to claim that it is my opponents who are the cranks: the minority vote. For if, as they claim, fatuous musical comedy is the ideal theatrical entertainment, there is certainly plenty of it: the theatre, from their point of view, is in an admirable state. And yet, in England at least, three-quarters of the people who easily could go to theatres never do so at all: if they want forgetfulness, they unhypocritically choose the pewter pot and its like, which is really far more effective than the most expensive musical comedy; or if they want rest, they simply go home to bed. So that's that.

Then there is the attitude of that body which regards the theatre as something several degrees more sacred than religion; which regards an intelligent interest in the theatre as the first duty of every citizen. They would make of the theatre an intellectual tyranny more intolerant than any religion, indeed. It may not so appear at first sight, but their attitude is fundamentally the same as that of the writers in the Sporting Press: they are endeavouring to insist on the necessity of the universal recognition and adoption of the attitude of quite a small section of the public.

As a matter of fact, the theatre, both as it is and even as it is ideally envisaged by either of these two bodies of opinion, is not a general or national affair at all. The play-going public, to which I have had through all my life the thrill and pleasure of belonging, is merely an infinitesimal section of the people. Shattered I should feel (though a little less shattered the older I grow) if all that the theatre means to me was to be withheld; but I am not going to pretend that the æsthetic and emotional value of the theatre can be turned into a State affair. And so, sub-consciously perhaps, but

rightly, think the great, compact, liberal majority of my fellow citizens; and that is why we have no National Theatre, and shall not have for a very long time. For you may defend, they say in effect, a rational desire for the amusement and recreation of jaded people, but you have no more right to ask a subsidy for a theatre than to invite us to subsidize a National Night Club, or to build a National Granary for the storing of wild oats. A National Theatre, without a national consciousness of its need, would be a poor thing. And anybody who has lived through the late Victorian and Edwardian and early Georgian eras must be well aware that a theatre which is vital, arresting—a reflection of anything that really counts in the spirit of the nation—is not going to spring up in answer to any demand from the present play-going public. And I shall only believe in that national consciousness when I hear that, after their day's work is over, the architect's draughtsman is ready to draw, the plumber willing to plumb, the bricklayer to lay bricks, simply through patriotism and their love of acting (and by courtesy, of course, of their respective unions), and for no financial consideration. Then, and then only, a National Theatre that was really national could arise. It happened in Prague, which is a town possessing a population about the same as that of Liverpool, as I have related elsewhere.

I don't believe that it will always be impossible here; but I maintain that it won't be your theatre-lovers, as we know them, that will bring it about.

So what I imagine the critic meant, who said that ours was a Theatre with a Pose, was that it neither aimed directly at inflicting an intellectual tyranny over the whole nation (and so having complete universality), nor at adopting the *recognized* pose of administering the usual anodyne to these people. If to appeal to a certain section only of the public, and to choose for that appeal a section which is not the one

usually catered for, is a pose, then we are *poseurs*; but my defence is that in following my slogan of Recreation with Exercise I am appealing to a greater and more important section than either that which cries for Recreation with Dissipation, or that which asks for Exercise without Recreation.

However, let us come down to the more immediate question of discussing my little theatre, its actual aims and methods; or you will think I am becoming intolerably arrogant, that I am claiming for the Lyric Theatre that I imagine it to be the sole authentic Egg from which the Roc of a really vital National Theatre shall be hatched. Of course, I claim nothing of the kind. There is only just this minim of an atom of truth in the suggestion, that it does seem to appeal to a variety of people whose attraction to it is not primarily such as I have described; who are not, in fact, playgoers by habit at all, or in the accepted meaning of the term. And if I can prove this I shall be making a claim for it with which I shall be quite proud and happy to be content.

But meanwhile, let me return to mere description, which is much easier for me than theorizing (and I find writing anything at all so difficult that I shall make no apology for choosing the easier path). Let me simply lay down some of the rules which I try to keep to in providing my modest entertainments—touching a little, as I must, on my own share in framing and carrying them out.

You will remember, perhaps, that Gordon Craig (whose influence upon all that is best in the modern theatre cannot be overrated, even though he is apparently content to reign now, as Granville-Barker has picturesquely phrased it, " supreme master in a theatre of the clouds "), has laid down the rule that an efficient theatre director must combine in himself all the talents and equipments necessary for its well-being. He must, unless I misunderstand him, not only pro-

duce the plays himself, but also be the designer of the scenery and the costumes, have a complete mastery over every detail of the lighting, be an expert in and teacher of dancing, gesture and elocution. Human nature being as it is, it is easy to reduce his argument to absurdity; for could we not perpend, following the same logic, that an author is unnecessary in a theatre ? I can imagine, at any rate, a company of comedians who are such brilliant dialogists that any audience will be entranced to listen to any impromptu conversation from them on any subject. I can imagine an author, even, of such commanding presence, such variety of oratory, that he requires no comedians to interpret his thoughts. Indeed, if Mr. Bernard Shaw could spare the time, and add to his gifts that of appearing in twenty-seven different repertory theatres on the same evening, he would admirably fill the bill. When, recently, he read one of his own plays from 2 LO, I did for the first time tremble for the future of the theatre, for a better entertainment I could scarcely imagine. Luckily, Shaw is pretty well unique in this respect. In practice, however, Craig is asking for impossibilities. I take it that the arts of writing, acting, music, designing scenery and lighting are called into play to support the weaknesses of the component parts, which, coagulated, form what is considered to be a satisfactory theatrical entertainment. To aid and regulate that coagulation is the function of the producer, who, though he may (and indeed must) have a working knowledge, or at any rate a skilled appreciation, of these different arts, need not, and perhaps should not, have that highly specialised knowledge of any one of them which might tend to prejudice him in its favour.

I am aware, of course, that in saying this I issue a public condemnation of myself in the capacity of producer; but there is just this to be said in condonation, that the art of

acting is at present, at any rate, the particular art of the theatre which furnishes it with the greatest attraction; and it is the art which requires the most special and diplomatic handling. As a matter of fact, very few people (though the habit of talking glibly about it has grown considerably in the last few years) have any *real* knowledge of what is meant by the art or craft of the producer; and indeed, his function, as you will agree—when I have attempted to do it—seems difficult enough to define or explain. You will grant, I imagine, that, the age of spontaneous generation being some time past, he is a necessary functionary. I will try, then, to lay down the rules which a good producer, having some ideal in front of him other than attracting the greatest numbers to his theatre, should observe.

In the first place, having chosen his play—which must have, apart from its dramatic attractiveness, some literary quality (to use an adjective which has acquired a clear meaning to most people, though no doubt different from that which it was originally intended to convey)—he must see that this quality is in no way impaired by the manner of its presentation, Scyllae and Charybdides besetting him upon every side.

There are the actors to be guided, to be told that their first duty is to allow the audience to hear the words of the author—a duty from which, alas! too many of them seem extraordinarily averse, thereby, perhaps, conferring on some authors an unintended kindness (but never, I hope and believe, at Hammersmith). And, having learnt that first duty, very often to be told not to shout—how one subtle jest, to get its full effect, must be casually dropped over the footlights (and be plainly heard in the back row of the gallery at the same time). Believe me, it is a difficult enough trick this, of acting, and full of apparent contradictions; and the instinct of doing it right is one of the rarest in human society

—a rarity which, perhaps, you will say does human society no harm.

When it comes to Opera, the difficulties of the poor man are, of course, multiplied a hundredfold. The number of excuses a singer can make for keeping what the author obviously intended for the world at large a steadfast secret between him or herself and the gentleman in the prompt-box are simply without number. There are, of course, honourable exceptions, the brightest of all of which is my old friend, Frederick Ranalow. I did once succeed, to their no doubt unutterable astonishment, in allowing a vast audience to hear every word of an opera at Drury Lane. The occasion was the first performance of a new version of " The Marriage of Figaro." But the methods adopted were extremely drastic, and I'm not sure that they did not deal a deadly blow to Opera in English in general, and were not a prime cause of many of Sir Thomas Beecham's financial troubles ! I persuaded that great enthusiast and great man to let me stop his entire orchestra at rehearsals whenever I couldn't hear a word from the back of the pit. It was certainly a successful experiment; but the cost of it would have made even Sir Basil Zaharoff sit up and take notice, and it will be small comfort for you to know that, even in my own small theatre, when you can't hear the words of a song, the defect can be laid at the doors of our great English Capitalist System.

Then arises the vexed question of scenery, bound up with half a hundred problems of the unobtrusive background, the necessity of illusion, and the different effects of the attempt at illusion conveyed at the same time to different people sitting in the same place and different planes in that place: how an audience must be trained to do without this and without that, and how much better and happier they become when their training is completed. And the " waits " that are saved thereby, not to mention other and more sordid savings;

and the question of the new lighting and all its joys and dangers—and by dangers I don't mean explosions so much as the risk of substituting in a modern theatre a Schwabe-Hasseit sunset for Professor Crummles' immortal pump. But I won't, in a book which is intended to be cheerful, be led by these reflections into a maelstrom of technicalities.

When I have decided upon a play and the actors that are to play in it, I go, and always shall go, whatever the play may be, to a pictorial artist to carry out the designs for the scenery, dresses and lighting. Three jobs, one man. This is essential, for the three things are, or should be, indivisible. Having found my artist, I tell him that he is to have an absolutely free hand; and having thus made him feel thoroughly confident and buoyant, I proceed to hamper him with a dozen regulations in restraint of too much buoyancy and confidence; and all, I hope, for his own good. And indeed, all that I choose for him, or rather with him, are the general shape of the scene, with an insistence on economy and simplicity of effect; and I make with him some form of agreement as to how far he may or may not stray from the correctness of the period chosen, and how his dresses must not hamper too much the general movements of the actors. After that he becomes and remains, as he should be, benevolent tyrant of the situation, and his decrees are final and unalterable. Only in this way can salvation be found. Once you arrive at the state of things when your leading lady can frighten the designer of her dress from pink to plum, all hope may be abandoned. Waists must be lowered or heightened at his command, fringes razed at his wish. And the artist designer of the scenery should have complete control also of the lighting as far as it affects his colours and shapes; very often even of the grouping. I say this a little shyly, perhaps, because it so happens that I do arrange and take a good deal of trouble over all that may be called grouping

myself; but I should certainly not resent (indeed, I should welcome) any suggestion or complaint from my artist-designer in this particular department of the stage arrangements. It so happens that Lovat Fraser and Nicholson, Doris Zinkeisen and Sheringham have always paid me the compliment of agreeing with what I have done in this direction—and, I hope and believe, without reservation. There must, of course, sometimes be differences of opinion, for it isn't a perfect world; but I have never been unlucky enough not to be able to find these differences settle after discussions which are full of interest to me—if at times a little too exciting! And if they cannot be? Well, well, I must find another artist, I suppose, and he another producer. I repeat that it is an imperfect world.

As I write these lines I am invited by a fair but unknown correspondent to answer the following question:

Dear Sir, *13th Nov.* 1924.

I shall feel exceedingly grateful if you will kindly tell me where I can buy the same kind of beautifully shaped glasses as used in the toasting scene in "The Duenna"

Yours truly,

. . . . . .

To which I can only reply truthfully:

Lyric Theatre,
Hammersmith, W.

Dear Madam, *14th Nov.* 1924.

You will be amused and perhaps gratified to hear that the glasses you refer to, used not only in "The Duenna" but also surviving from the run of "The Beggar's Opera," are really small sugar bowls purchaseable at Woolworth's Stores for sixpence each.

Yours truly,
(Signed) NIGEL PLAYFAIR.

I am grateful to my correspondent for enabling me to give a concrete example of the advantage of simplicity and economy in sustaining illusion. It seems to me to be worth a hundred pages of explanation!

As with the artist-designer, so with the actors, so with the musicians, and with all the others that are parts of the whole. Each of them is, in his or her own way, creative, and not a mere puppet who can be used mechanically to carry out an author's or a producer's fancy. If from the general effect created they protrude, to the destruction of the general rhythm and pattern of the whole—and this after they have listened, as they must listen, to the guidance of the expert who is moulding the affair from outside, and who alone can see the effect as a whole—so much the less artists they. But I will have none of the system of grades superior and inferior in the theatre. There is none whose part is so small that it does not matter, and whose perfect performance cannot infinitely help. There is none whose performance can by itself be so perfect that insufficiency in others will not infinitely detract. In effect, for me it is always the entertainment as a whole that counts; that is why, even when ever so young and enthusiastic, I would never bother to cross the road to see any of the great foreign stars who would pay our intelligence their annual insults in the old Grand Season days now doomed to depart—and by me, at any rate, unwept for.

Don't think for one moment, please, that in saying this I decry for one moment the genius of a Bernhardt, a Duse, and a Réjane. They were merely victims of a vicious system. Of all the great pleasures the French Stage has given me, I think the greatest has been the appearance of Yvette Guilbert by herself, just with an accompanist: great art, supreme acting.

But the intellectual snobbery which has impelled English people to go to a play by a tenth-rate author, in which a

foreign star has stood right out of the picture (" supported " by a company which, had they been English, would have been laughed off the stage of the Pier at Margate), and then turn round to me and ask me: " Why can't English actors act like that ? But then, of course, French people are born actors, aren't they ? "—does make my blood boil.

That intellectual snobbery still exists: it is still hard to persuade a large and influential section of society that the terms " Englishman " and " Artist " are compatible—especially when the Theatre and the Opera are in question. One critic, writing the other day, and kind enough to wish to compliment me on something I had done, added (and thought, no doubt, that he was saying something that would please me vastly): " But, then, Mr. Playfair has a *Gallic* mind." Here, by these presents, I thank him not at all. None of your French kick-shaws for me ! Don't forget, though, that I am only talking in the terms of the common-or-garden theatre world; I am not thinking about Voltaire and Anatole France—nor, to do him justice, was he—but the ordinary mummer-folk of the two countries.

The truth unvarnished is, great and unforgettable as was its achievement in the past, and great as it will doubtless be in the future, that the French Theatre is at the moment ten years behind our own, little advanced as that may be; though, indeed, they do possess in Mr. Pitoeff (who happens to be a Russian) the greatest producer of the century, and in his wife the greatest actress.

Forgive me for this little burst of patriotism, allowable to me who am politically an exiled follower of Mr. Asquith, and a convinced Free Trader. I am really not, I hope, insular.

The " star " system, though at its worst, perhaps, in France (just as it was scotched most successfully, curiously enough, in pre-Soviet Russia), is even to this day a terrible bar to the advancement of the best art of the theatre in this

country, as, but for the free-lance and rebel theatres, it would be in America.

So long as plays are chosen with the particular view of being suitable to one or two outstanding personalities, so long will there be a dearth of good plays upon our stage. It may be true enough that in the end few good plays are overlooked altogether, though I am pretty sure it happens. I am thinking more of the plays unborn: the lack of freedom in expression which comes from such a system must, and obviously does, deter many of our greatest writers from devoting their talents to the service of the stage.

I am myself fortunate (or unfortunate, as you may choose to look upon it) in that I have never been, and was never likely to become, a star actor. Like all actors, in spite of that, I am naturally fond of a good part, and am always glad when I find that in any play that I have determined to produce there is such a good part suitable to my personality; but I think I can honestly say that I have never been biased in favour of a play because of that circumstance—indeed, I have up to now stood aside in the case of the majority of plays produced at this theatre.

Of course, circumstances alter cases. One would not expect in present conditions a famous actor-manager to sacrifice himself. He would not by so doing be carrying out the duties that he owes to the public; and if you consider the disadvantages in this respect from which the eminent men of the immediate past (like Irving, Tree and Alexander) suffered, it would be both priggish and untrue to deny that they did what they could, and sacrificed even a great deal both of money and personal vanity in order to support the interests of the higher drama. I am writing of theatres like my own, which are not intended primarily to provide large profits for their shareholders or their directors: a disintention which the Lyric, Hammersmith, has certainly carried out to a nicety.

I might perhaps in this place say a few words in explanation and defence of the particular plays which have been selected for performance during these last six years.

I have been accused, I know, of devoting myself too much to the classics of the eighteenth century, too little to Shakespeare, the Elizabethan Drama, and still less to plays by living authors. The accusation, as a glance at the copies of the programmes in the Appendix will show, cannot really be sustained. A major portion of the period has, it is true, been occupied with these eighteenth-century revivals: that is merely because, whether owing to any special fault of mine or not in the production of the others I cannot say (though frankly, I am loth to believe it), they are at the moment far more to the taste of the paying public. In actual fact, the eighteenth-century plays have always shown a profit, the others have not; and this theatre is only subsidized by its successes. In spite of that fact, I have not the remotest intention of confining myself to them, though there remain enough of them of the greatest interest to fill all the working days which I can look forward to.

One more thing let me say, and very gratefully say. The success of this theatre, almost in its entirety, is due to the taste and support of the general public. People have talked of fashion, a craze for the picturesqueness of the pastiche, the adventurous love of South Kensington for a daring expedition into Wildest Hammersmith. But these explanations will not do. Fashion can fill a theatre for a week, perhaps, but not for six months. The truth lies somewhere here: in the great bulk of the people there is latent always a craving for beauty, for simplicity of treatment, for the acquiring of the knowledge of what great men and great wits have thought and written, and last and not least for the old native folk music well played and well sung. If we have been able to do something to allay or stimulate that craving it is sufficient reward.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Roundabouts

(*What you make on the swings you lose on the roundabouts.*)

"The Knight of the Burning Pestle." Kingsway, November 1920

"Polly." Lyric, 30th December 1922

"Body and Soul." Regent, 11th September 1922—7th October 1922

"The Insect Play." Regent, 5th May 1923—9th June 1923

"Robert E. Lee." Regent, 20th June 1923—22nd September 1923

"Savitri." Lyric, 24th June 1921

"The Discovery." R.A.D.A., 4th May 1924

Portmadoc Players. Lyric, 26th February 1924

The Father and Mother of Revue—Philip Sidney on Scenery—A Performing Bear—"Author!"—Betty Chester, Hermione Baddeley and Noel Coward—Summoned by my Lord Rothermere—He Explains the Art of Boom—A Digression on Press-Agents and Pineapples, Shaw and Chesterton—The History of "Polly"—Swift's low Opinion—Mr. Bax, Picture Restorer (and Repainter)—William Nicholson—Our Cardiff Polly—The Press and the Teacups—The End of It—We Take the Regent—Motor-bus Wallpaper—We Fly to Prague—"The Insect Play"—Doris Zinkeisen—"Robert E. Lee"—Back to the Lyric—"Savitri"—The Phœnix—The Three Hundred Club—The Portmadoc Players: a Lesson to us in Finance.

VIII

I HAVE already had occasion to refer to the myth that we of the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, have made numerous fortunes. We haven't; but supposing we had, this chapter tells you how we lost many of them again. That is one reason why I have called it "Roundabouts." Another is because it concerns various productions which do not strictly come into the main body of this history. It concerns one or two plays which were produced at the Lyric Theatre, but were not produced by our syndicate; but chiefly it deals with plays which our syndicate produced at other theatres, or which I produced for other friendly managements which were good enough to ask for my services. And it really seemed as if there must be some magic charm in the Lyric, for wherever else we went we won plenty of kudos and so on, but we lost money hand over fist!

The first outside production I undertook was that of the revival of "The Knight of the Burning Pestle," which was staged by me, on behalf of Mr. Bronson Albery, at the Kingsway Theatre. This was in November 1920, when "The Beggar's Opera" was well in its stride. It had been revived by the Mermaid Society at the Royalty in 1904, when I myself played the part of Ralph; and I have always had it at the back of my mind as another possible revival. It is really the first English revue; or rather, it is a burlesque —not so much of a particular play as of a whole type of fashionable literature. Beaumont and Fletcher wrote it to laugh at the high-falutin' romanticism of the fashionable drama and fashionable life of the day: it was a kind of corollary and rider to Cervantes' "Don Quixote," which had just appeared in English for the first time. The *Westminster*

Gazette summed it up rather well when they described it as "the seventeenth-century equivalent of a revue crossed with a Pelissier evening of the good old days of the Follies."

It was first produced in 1611, and was not a great success, for the fashion for what it ridiculed was too strong to bear laughing at so lightly. But in 1682 it was revived, with Nell Gwynne in it, and made a considerable hit. In the seventeenth century Beaumont and Fletcher were almost more popular than any other English dramatists. Dryden (speaking of their plays) calls them "The most pleasant and frequent entertainments of the stage, two of theirs being acted through the year to one of Shakespeare's or Jonson's; the reason is because there is a certain gaiety in their comedies and pathos in their most serious plays which suits generally men's humour. Shakespeare's language is likewise a little obsolete, and Ben Jonson's wit comes short of theirs."

To a modern mind it seems burlesque of the most farcical character, but apparently its authors thought otherwise; to them it was a delicate refinement of humour. "Our intent was to move inward delight," they say in their preface, "not outward lightness, and to breed soft smiling, not loud laughter, knowing it to be a great pleasure when counsel is mixed with wit." It tells of a prentice grocer, who, fired by the romaunts of chivalry (the "shilling shockers" of those days), climbs on to the stage when a play is in process of production, and insists on playing the principal part; which he does to the great delight of his master and mistress and the no little disturbance of the plot of the play, the action of which is twisted and altered to push him forward whenever possible.

It was certainly a very amusing play to produce, and one paper accused me of "burlesquing the burlesque!" We fixed up a parody of an Elizabethan stage, complete with apron and musicians' gallery. There was, of course, in the strictest sense of the term, no scenery: for that we took our

cue from Sir Philip Sidney, in his account of the scenery of his day:

"Now you shall see these ladies walk to gather flowers, and then we must believe the stage to be a garden. By and bye we hear news of a shipwreck in the same place, and we are to blame if we accept it not for a rock. Upon the back of that comes out a hideous monster, and then the miserable beholders are bound to take it for a cave, while in the meantime two armies fly in, represented by four swords and a buckler."

Waltham Forest I represented by four little shrubs in boxes.

My next difficulty was the question of an interval; for, as is well known, there were no intervals, in our sense of the word, on the Elizabethan stage. There was no scenery to move, and the audiences seemed to have taken a curious interest in the plays themselves, rather than in the opportunity they offered of meeting one's friends in the foyer! Indeed, it is probable that if an Elizabethan manager had arbitrarily stopped his play for a quarter of an hour in the middle, the fiery audience would have taken some pretty strong measures to make him get on with it! However, not so the modern audience. And so, for want of some better device, I introduced a performing bear, which engrossed the attention of the characters from their "play within a play" and allowed the curtain to fall.

Another difficulty, of course, was the question of language, for one cannot have footnotes on the stage! But I did my best by providing a glossary—an unfortunate expedient, but one difficult to improve upon.

It was an exciting first night; and the critics and public both divided their opinions over a pretty wide range. One member of the audience started up with the exclamation,

" I have never heard such nonsense in my life ! " But, on the other hand, when the curtain fell there were encouraging but naïve cries of " Author ! "

Meanwhile, we brought into London some of the young actors and actresses who had first appeared with us. Hermione Baddeley, as Michael Merrythought, made a great hit, and established herself as an infant prodigy—and a prodigy she is still. Betty Chester, as the Citizen's Wife, came in for some hard knocks: everybody said that she was too young for the part, and worse, that she *deliberately* played it young. I began to realize that the modern stage is almost as conservative as the eighteenth-century one: that because it had always been the tradition to play the Citizen's Wife as an elderly dame, so she must stay till Kingdom Come, and not to be allowed to do as so many wives do nowadays —grow younger as the years go by. In the play itself there is no evidence for making her old: the notion that Ralph is her son is quite untrue—he is her husband's apprentice. Moreover, she expressly speaks of one of her children as an infant. No, it was not simply miscasting or ignorance that made me give Betty Chester the part: I gave it her because that was how it seemed to me that the part should be played. And getting over the pedantic side of the tradition, the critics could not but be pleased with her presentation.

Another actor who largely made his name in this production (I put it that way, but of course wherever I speak of our having made the name of an actor it means equally that the actor made ours—that we owe quite as much to him or her as he or she does to us—I don't want to seem arrogant or ungrateful) was Noel Coward, who played the part of Ralph the 'prentice boy, and thus climbed on to the stage both literally and figuratively, and has continued to grace it ever since.

Of course, the real drawback of the play was that its wit

largely depended on topical allusion, more so than "The Beggar's Opera." "The wit and charm which Beaumont and Fletcher put into their burlesque," says Edward Shanks, "were too closely bound up with its immediate occasions: they did not escape into the timeless regions of absurdity whither Gay's fooling carried him." And so the *Athenæum* called it "a jolly nursery romp"; which apparently was the worst word of abuse in the vocabulary of that venerable paper.

Anyhow, we ran it through the Christmas holidays to our own no little enjoyment, and to that also, I truly believe, of the public; and I am glad to think Mr. Albery was not ruined by his little venture.

The second "Roundabout" was a very different matter. It was an extraordinarily interesting experiment in a sphere to which we had hitherto paid little attention. Its whole method was as diametrically opposed to that of our other productions as it well could be; I don't, of course, mean the methods of its production, which I naturally conducted as usual, according to my lights—I mean the way the play was chosen, and the way the public were tackled about it. To begin with, its production was not my idea at all, but Lord Rothermere's. It was produced, not for the sake of the play—in fact, the merit or demerit of the play was in Lord Rothermere's consideration the least important aspect of theatrical production.

But Lord Rothermere had a great admiration and affection for that promising singer whose death was so sudden and premature, Pitt-Chatham. So he decided that a play should be put on in which Pitt-Chatham should be given his chance. That the play was to be a success goes without saying; and Lord Rothermere's idea of a success was something which should be the closest possible imitation of something else successful. The most successful thing then

running in London was obviously "The Beggar's Opera." So he sent for me and asked me if there was another play exactly like it. I told him of the existence of "Polly"; I also told him that, compared with "The Beggar's Opera," "Polly" was a very inferior play indeed.

"That doesn't matter at all," said Lord Rothermere, "provided it's exactly like it, with the same characters, and written by the same man."

He hinted that the Press could give the Stage a wrinkle or two in the matter of forming public opinion.

Now, I think this is the time when I ought to mention that I have never, in the whole history of the management of the Lyric, employed a press-agent. Except the barest bulletin of first-night arrangements and so on, I have never even sent a paragraph to the Press; and yet I suppose the press-books of the Lyric are quite as fat as those of any of the other managements who keep cunning young men at enormous salaries to smuggle advertisement disguised as news into the columns of the Daily Press.

Far be it from me to decry the ingenuity of these people: there is nothing they cannot do. Suppose, for instance, that a press-agent is required by the Fruiterers' Association to produce within a month fifty prominent references to the subject of pineapples in the popular Press: it is nothing to him. He begins, say, by ringing up G. K. Chesterton, and asking him what he is having for breakfast. We will suppose that Mr. Chesterton answers that he is having a rump steak, and bacon and eggs, and beer.

"Don't you think," the mysterious voice answers, "that fruit might be a more wholesome diet—that bacon and eggs might give way to bananas, and rump steak to pineapples?"

"The downfall of the British Empire will come," roars Mr. Chesterton, "when the British nation takes to eating fruit for breakfast!" and slams down the receiver.

Next day, of course, there are headlines in all the papers: "Mr. Chesterton attributes Perdition to Pineapples"—and so on. Then the wily publicity-man rings up Mr. Shaw and tells him that Mr. Chesterton thinks the British nation, etc. Does Mr. Shaw agree with him?

"Me agree with Mr. Chesterton!" roars Mr. Shaw. "Never! When the British nation takes pineapples for breakfast they will all write as good plays as I do!"

That is how it is done; and a lot of the stage stories that you see in the Press are not half as innocent and spontaneous as they appear. They have been concocted in the manager's office, and the editor has been blandished into accepting them.

All this, as I have said, is very ingenious, but it is not to my mind the Theatre. I have gone on the principle, and shall continue to do so, that if a play is good it will automatically become an item of news value; that unless a story is worth being published on its own merits it is not worth being published at all—and that fictitious publicity of this sort is never of any great value. Far be it from me to decry the power of the Press; but it is an ultimate fact that after the first few weeks of a production its continued success depends not upon reporters at all, but on the opinions passed from man to man and woman to woman by those who have already seen it.

Lord Rothermere, as I have said, thought otherwise. "Given proper publicity," he said, "any play can be made to succeed." And in this case, of course, a super-publicity agent was employed. The result was that before its production "Polly" was one of the most talked-of plays in London; but two months after its production it was hardly ever mentioned.

I could not subscribe to his Lordship's dictum that the play did not matter at all. "Polly," as it originally stood,

would (it seemed to me) be hissed off the stage, publicity or no. Gay was a disappointed man when he wrote it, and a sick one; it lacked altogether the breadth of humanity of "The Beggar's Opera." Macheath becomes a mere villain, Polly a mere heroine of melodrama; and the tedious *melange* of noble savages and pirates did but little to redeem it. Gay was induced to take care of his moral purpose, with the result that the interest of the play does *not* take care of itself.

The allusions to politicians are more vague and general, and less directly personal, than those in "The Beggar's Opera"; but Walpole was again portrayed, in the character of Ducat, and this time he was not so good-tempered about it. The play was banned by the Lord Chamberlain, and was not produced for many years after; but its banning only served to arouse popular interest, and when it was published Gay actually made £1,200 out of it in book form—more than he got for the production of "The Beggar's Opera"!

A Court ban, too, was inflicted. Gay's old friend, the Duchess of Queensberry, was caught soliciting for subscriptions for the book actually in the Royal Household, and the King forbade her the Court. The Duchess replied with delightful impertinence in the following letter:

"The Duchess of Queensberry is surprised and well pleased that the King hath given her so agreeable a command as to stay from Court, where she never came for diversion, but to bestow a great civility on the King and Queen. She hopes by such an unprecedented order as this that the King will see as few as he wishes at this Court, particularly such as dare to think or speak the truth. I dare not do otherwise, and ought not, nor could have imagined that it would not have been the very highest compliment that I could possibly pay the King to endeavour to support truth and innocence in his house, particularly when the King and

Queen both told me that they had not read Mr. Gay's play. I have certainly done right, then, to stand by my own words rather than his Grace of Grafton's, who hath neither made use of truth, judgment nor honour, through this whole affair, either for himself or his friends."

When " Polly " was produced at last in 1777 it had little success, and only ran for a few nights, at each of which the aged and indefatigable Duchess attended; and it is said that it was after one of these performances that she caught the chill which killed her. Mrs. John Larpent (or the Baroness de Hochepied) was a friend of the Duchess, and writes in her diary:

" June 25th. At the play. ' Polly,' or the second part of ' The Beggar's Opera.' I was extremely pleased to go with the Duchess and see this opera, which, from the protection she gave its author Gay and from the spirit of the time, occasioned her dismission from Court. She heard it with delight. She sang all the airs after ye actors. She told me a story about every song—how Gay wrote it such a night after supper at Amesbury, how he wanted a Rime, how she helped him out, etc., etc. I think the story pretty and affecting. It overleaps the bounds of probability and the moral is nothing remarkably pointed, although the Duchess told me that, on Gay's being accused of immorality in the end of ' ye Beggar's Opera,' some noblemen (I really think Lord Bath, but I am not certain) said, ' Why, Gay, you have only transported him, pursue him and bring him to punishment.' ' And see,' says she, ' how finely he has wrought the tale. But,' said she, ' I was punished because Macheath was to be hanged and Gay's moral vindicated. I told the Lord Chamberlain I thanked him, it saved me trouble and curtsies.' "

Swift never thought much of it. On 19th March he wrote

to Gay, "I never had much hope of your vamped play, although Mr. Pope seemed to have, and although it were ever so good. But you should have done like the parsons—changed your text—I mean, your title and the names of the persons." This was in reply to a somewhat priggish letter of Gay's, in which he said, "For writing in the cause of virtue and against the fashionable vices I am looked upon at present as the most obnoxious person almost in England."

To cut a long matter short, "Polly" was simply a *re-chauffé* of what of the inspiration of "The Beggar's Opera" still remained in Gay's mind.

As well as its production in 1777, it was revived in 1782 and 1813, but never with any success at all; and it did not seem to me likely to be any more successful in 1922 unless very drastic alterations were made. Accordingly I called in Mr. Clifford Bax, who adapted and re-wrote it considerably, and abolished the moral ending by which Macheath meets his death in the disguise of Morano, the blackamoor pirate, and substituted one happier and more immoral; in short, he is married to Polly yet again. And what success the play had was very largely due to Mr. Bax. Many of the critics, though, took it for granted that Mr. Bax had simply marred what was good.

The music was arranged by Frederic Austin. The original music was very rudimentary, consisting of over seventy fragments, and only the bare tunes were given, with at most a clumsy, unfigured bass. Mr. Austin had to reconstruct and fill them in: he also constructed an overture out of the tunes, as there was none. For the sake of secrecy, he composed in a converted hay-loft in Kensington.

The scenery was designed by that very famous painter, William Nicholson, whose genius for stage decoration, owing to the heavy calls upon his time, is—alas !—not too

SKETCH OF THE ACT-DROP FOR "POLLY"; BY WILLIAM NICHOLSON

often at the service of the theatre. To me, at any rate, his three scenes for " Polly " were a sheer joy.

The idea of producing the play, as I have said, was (on Lord Rothermere's part) to give Pitt-Chatham his chance. But one cannot produce an opera with a single singer, and we had considerable difficulty in filling up the rest of the cast. If " The Beggar's Opera " had been over, it would have been a simple matter: the same people could have taken the same parts in the sequel. But " The Beggar's Opera " showed no signs of being over, and so we had to find an entirely fresh set of actors.

As I wrote at the time, in an article which was my sole contribution to the boom, and was not at all approved of by the super-press-agent:

" Despite the many kind things that have been said in predicting as long a run for ' Polly ' as for ' The Beggar's Opera,' I don't want the impression to get abroad that ' Polly,' as it originally stood, was the masterpiece that ' The Beggar's Opera ' was. Gay was a tired man when he wrote ' Polly ': he had used up many of his ideas, and he was not particularly anxious to write it at all, as you will see if you read his preface. Nevertheless, there are many beautiful and witty things in ' Polly '; and as it has now been re-cast, mainly owing to the good work of Mr. Clifford Bax, I think it will prove a good play. We have had a more difficult task to produce it than in the case of ' The Beggar's Opera,' and have had to approach it from a different angle and adopt different methods of treatment. The play as it stood printed in 1729 was rather unwieldy, and we have had to do a good deal of adapting. Our difficulty in producing has been to avoid repetition and the adoption of the same methods that served in the case of ' The Beggar's Opera.' The atmosphere of ' Polly ' is much less serene and more boisterous than

that of the Hammersmith play. There were hundreds of applicants for the small cast. None of the members of ' The Beggar's Opera ' are taking part in ' Polly,' and that has been one of my greatest difficulties, because it has not been easy to repeat a cast for a second play on the same lines as the first. The costumes, with one or two exceptions, are different from those of ' The Beggar's Opera,' and are nearly all in silk—not, let me say, in brocade."

The principal difficulty was to find a Polly. She had to be " pretty as a peach, a beautiful singing voice, a slim and graceful figure, and an accomplished actress." In the end, of course, we discovered Lilian Davies, a Cardiff girl in her early twenties, who had sung in light opera and on the concert platform. She was the daughter of a sea-captain who was drowned at sea when Lilian was three years old. I tried a great many Pollies before I found her; but when Miss Davies had sung one song I knew her to be the Polly I was looking for. And indeed, so thought the public: her success was instantaneous and complete, and it is an extraordinary thing that at the time of writing this she has not since found a part which gave her a chance to repeat that success.

Eugène Goossens conducted the orchestra, which was in itself something of a novelty, being a combination of strings, harpsichord, a quartet of wind instruments, and trumpet and drum fanfares.

There was, of course, as the result of Lord Rothermere's publicity work, tremendous advance booking, which most of the papers took for a certain sign of a long run, though the *Lady*, wise in its generation, considered " the excessive and over-adulatory advertisement " which preceded the production an obstacle to success which would have to be overcome. On the day, queues for the pit had assembled in the early morning, and lengthened and lengthened as the

day wore on. About four o'clock the press-agent stood pensively at the window, watching them and trying to think of a new stunt.

"I have it!" he said. "We'll give them tea, and we'll have them photographed drinking it!"

The whole theatre was immediately turned upside down to provide tea for this queue. The housekeeper was in despair. "I'm very sorry," she said, "but we haven't any tea, though we have plenty of cups."

"Never mind," said the press-agent: "Cups will do. That's all we want for a photograph!"

And so the cups were dealt out, and the queue persuaded to smile and look happy, being promised a real tea in about ten minutes—a promise which was amply fulfilled—and photographs of this melancholy refreshment were taken.

It was 30th December 1922. In spite of the gloomy prognostications of the *Lady*, the first night was wildly enthusiastic, and Lord Rothermere and I had equally the pleasant feeling that it was our own particular doing: Lord Rothermere convinced that it fulfilled all his theories about the use of "boom," and I convinced that it was due to Mr. Bax's very efficient re-hashing. For about twelve weeks it ran splendidly, full houses every night; and if it had been taken off then, or shortly after, we should have probably made financially a pretty good thing of it, although Lord Rothermere's expenses had been simply enormous. The *Liverpool Morning Post* credited him with having spent £30,000 on it: whether this was true or not I don't know. But instead of taking it off, the management did the opposite—they moved it to a larger theatre, falsely buoyed up by the good receipts of the first twelve weeks. And indeed, to the inexperienced eye, it might have looked as if all was well; but the professional would have noticed that, just before we moved, the bookings had slightly begun to drop—there were a few seats

empty every night. And very soon after it was translated to the Savoy the booking slumped heavily: expenses were increased, receipts were very much decreased.

Every play has its own natural length of run, and it is the business of a manager to prognosticate this. To take it off earlier is a waste; to keep it on longer is to lose what one has made. Even Lord Rothermere's publicity department could not make " Polly " succeed for more than its first twelve weeks. If we had confessed defeat at once and stopped it after a week or two at the Savoy things would not have been so bad; but Lord Rothermere was obstinately determined that what " boom " had done once it could do again, that the former success could be recaptured. And in the end the play was run to fast emptying houses for three months longer.

I rate Lord Rothermere as a theorist; but practically, he behaved like a thorough sportsman, and probably he continued the run long after he had ceased to believe in his theories out of sheer kindness to his company—especially after the sad death of Pitt-Chatham had deprived them of their leader. I don't think he cares for the theatre for the theatre's sake. Alas, how few of the potent do !

But probably the most important " Roundabout " undertaking of ours was our tenancy of the Regent Theatre in August 1922. It was then called the Euston Palace of Varieties: we renamed it the Regent as a compliment to Arnold Bennett, for you will remember that it was the name of the great theatre built by the " Card." It was all very right and proper that we should open it with a play of Bennett's in September, " Body and Soul." It was a light and cheerful play, going back, more or less, in manner to the vein which the author exploited in " The Great Adventure."

It was a Society play, and a satire both on the leaders of picture-paper society and on the general mania of people for

taking to crazes. Far the best act of the play was the one which took place in the house of the Mayor of Bursley.

On the first night it was quite well received, but the Press was rather fierce, and it never took—I don't quite know why: partly because, I think, the atmosphere of the Regent is not nearly as good as that of the Lyric (where we had originally intended to produce the play if " The Beggar's Opera " had not proved so difficult a tenant to evict). It is a large place—a great contrast from the cosiness of the Lyric, and it is harder to get at. But I suppose the delay which elapsed between Mr. Bennett's writing the play and our being able to produce it may have had something to do with it: several of the papers called it " old-fashioned," as indeed they are ready to call anything written more than six months ago!

We got into hot water once more with our scenery. It was designed by Doris Zinkeisen, and hit some of the critics most severely in the eye. The scene in the Grand Babylon Hotel, especially, proved a little too much for them, with its wall-paper patterned with crawling omnibuses standing on their hind legs, and with traffic wreathed round the friezes! Indeed, when the curtain rose on the second act, and they were faced with something a little more ordinary, a great sigh of (I am afraid) quite sincere relief went up all over the house. Miss Zinkeisen established herself well afterwards with her designs for " The Insect Play," which included some of the best stage dresses I have seen; but people are always ready to jump on anything new. The *Westminster Gazette* said: " The play itself is no consolation for the scenic outrage in which it is staged."

The odds were against us, and after a run of about three weeks we had to take it off.

We did not make another attempt to produce anything

at the Regent, letting it in the meantime to Mr. Barry Jackson, who very gradually warmed it to fever heat with " The Immortal Hour." But in the following May we put on " The Insect Play," by the brothers Karel and Josef Capek, which had made such a sensation by its production at Prague, and an even greater one in America, where it was paying its authors a hundred pounds a week ! Mr. Paul Selver translated it for us literally, and Clifford Bax and I collaborated in adapting it. I flew over with Stephen Thomas and Doris Zinkeisen, who was to do the designing, to Prague to see it. And by flew I *mean* flew. It took us only twice as long as going by train, as we had a forced descent in a Black Forest marsh and many other queer adventures to contend with.

It was meant by the brothers Capek far more as a reflection on human life generally than on Czech life in particular, though in writing it they naturally took the nearest way that came to hand, and made the habits of the insects seem to bear a special relation to life as it is lived in Prague. In the adaptation I thought it would carry out the spirit of the intention more closely to make the habits of the insects bear a relation to life as it is lived in this country: the Tramp, for instance, we made definitely an English tramp, and not a Czech or Slavonic vagabond, as he is in the orginal. In short, I tried to follow as far as possible the example of Granville-Barker's adaptation of the " Anatol " dialogues—in my opinion the most perfect example of an adaptation from one language to another—I mean in paraphrasing colloquialisms not in changing the characters.

Doris Zinkeisen is a conspicuous example of a fruitful union of the influence of various countries. She is of very distant Belgian extraction, but born in Scotland, and has lived in England most of her life; and it was through a Czech play that she first made her name. This time she got con-

LEPIDOPTERIST : DESIGN BY DORIS ZINKEISEN FOR "THE INSECT PLAY"

siderable praise for her dresses, which were carried out by Mrs. Lovat Fraser: and she certainly deserved it.

As for the play, the Press was very divided in its opinions. Mr. Sydney Carroll called it "An unparalleled effort in rampant lunacy . . . a futurist satirical phantasmagoria without beauty, truth or balance," while *Reynolds' Newspaper*, on the other hand, considered it "rather platitudinous and tame." The serious critics, however, were mostly impressed; and the play certainly, together with "R.U.R." (the other play by the brothers Capek), made a pretty big impression on public opinion. *Truth* described "The Insect Play" sportingly as "by Post-War Depression out of Fabre."

The chief humans are a Tramp and a Lepidopterist (Claude Rains), who meet in a forest glade: this forms a prologue. Then the Tramp sits down and watches insect life. In the first act it is given over to the Butterflies, who represent the upper classes, and the *demi-monde*—a Roué, a Guardsman, a Poet, and some gay ladies. The second act is devoted to the tragedy of Mr. and Mrs. Beetle, who with great toil roll on to the stage an enormous ball of earth which they call their "pile." This possession is evidently very precious, from the way in which they gloat over it. Exit Mr. Beetle, and his treasure is promptly and joyfully stolen by the Robber Beetle. Then enter Mr. and Mrs. Cricket, dancing and rejoicing because they are expecting an increase in their family. But their joy is soon cut short by the Ichneumon Fly (Ivan Berlyn), who murders them, and hoards their bodies to feed his ghastly larva (Elsa Lanchester). And in the last act we see the Ants setting about to make war. Soldier ants assemble on parade to hear an address on patriotism from the Kaiser ant, who is graciously pleased to take the God of Ants under his protection and make him honorary colonel of his favourite regiment. The act ends with a

battle of the ants; and there is an epilogue, in which snails carry out the duties of undertakers.

Looking back on it now, one feels that there is a little truth in everything that was said about the play, both praise and blame. The idea is brilliant, much of the execution is brilliant, and the result, as Mr. McCarthy said, is " remarkable, not easy to forget." But in attempting the adaptation of the play for an English audience one could not but feel, as was only natural, that gaps resulted—that the points were not followed up quite as fully as they might be; and, on the other hand, we had, to a certain extent, to take some of the bitterness off the satire. The Czech is thicker-skinned, and stands more bludgeoning than an English audience would. But the play certainly had more effect on serious critics than (I think I might say) almost any other play produced in post-war years.

The " Noes " had it in the Press, and at first the public followed them. But as the days went by the attendance increased gradually but surely. Had we been richer or more audacious, I have myself a sincere conviction that it would have become a great success, even financially. On the last night there wasn't an empty seat, and the applause was deafening. As for myself, its failure was a bitter disappointment—terribly bitter, but we must take these things philosophically. Anyway, a tip from the grave to the tenant of the Lyric, Hammersmith, in 2020, if he comes across this dusty book on some neglected shelf: revive " The Insect Play ! "

There remains one more play which we did at the Regent before giving up the attempt—Mr. Drinkwater's " Robert E. Lee." To my mind, it is the most carefully written, best planned, and most effective play that Mr. Drinkwater has yet done. Mr. Hubert Griffith, in the *Observer*, decided that it was the most effective of all Drinkwater's historical

plays; and Mr. St. John Ervine said the same: " His best play, a more human and moving piece than anything he has yet written. . . . Contains one of the best and most poignant battle scenes I have ever witnessed on the stage. . . . I wish he had insisted on the real tragedy of Lee's life, which was that he found himself compelled to fight in a cause in which he did not really believe."

In one sense it is a kind of corollary to " Abraham Lincoln." John Drinkwater himself said:

" I confess that after my studies and work on the Lincoln side of the Great American Civil War, I found it very interesting to present the other side of the story. Certainly, in writing the Lincoln play, I did absorb a great deal of the history of the struggle between the North and South. I had for some time wished to write a play round Lee and his men. . . . I have not attempted to give a biography of Lee any more than I did of Lincoln or of Cromwell. I take it that it is not a dramatist's business to rival the biographer, but only to make such selections from the life and adventures of his hero as make for dramatic effect, and to analyse certain points or facets of character. . . . I have studied the subject a great deal in Lee's own nation and State. I went all over the battlefields on which that war was waged. I hope I have shown something at least of Lee's inspiring courage and enthusiasm amid all the suffering. . . . I seek to show that war is the anger of bewildered peoples in front of questions that they cannot answer, that it is all a tragic mystery, but inescapable, and a mystery not without beauty."

Though Miss Zinkeisen's scenery was gradually getting more and more praise, and less and less abuse (one paper said it was " as effective as it was beautiful "), she still came in for one or two hard knocks. And so did I. " I have no space," said the critic of the *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic*

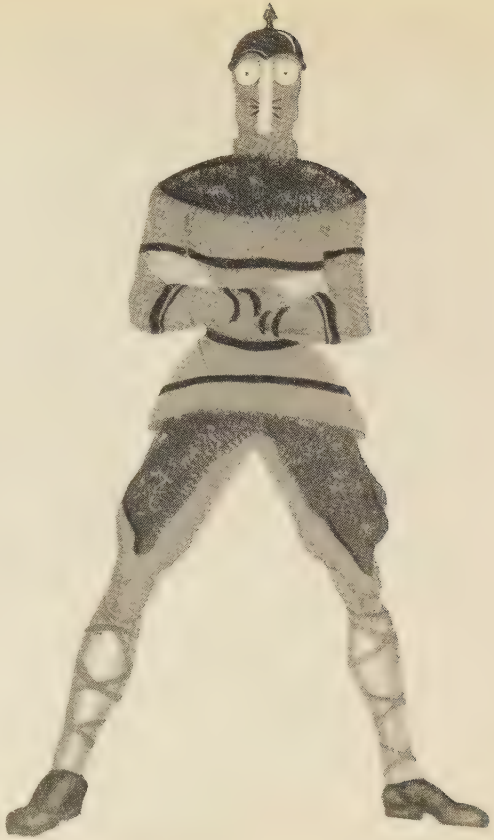
News, " in which to vituperate the production of Mr. Nigel Playfair as it deserves." I am sorry that he had not space: it would have been interesting to see this critic endeavouring to produce a rational substantiation of his opinion.

This play was concerned less with politics and the clash of opinions and personalities than with fighting and the incidents of victory and defeat. It is specially concerned with the question that faced Lee when the Civil War began, and his answer to it; with the personal gallantry and affection he inspired in his followers, and with the effect of the struggle (as Drinkwater reads it) on the future history of America.

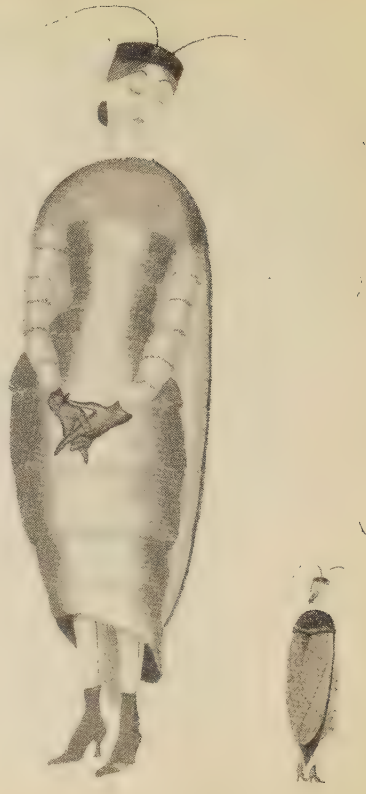
But once again we failed to draw the public to the Regent. Those who came were enthusiastic, but it was on those who stayed away that our fate depended. And we were compelled before very long to withdraw it, and to give up our whole attempt. We invited the Birmingham Repertory Company, with " The Immortal Hour," to take over the theatre from us on sharing terms, and our contract with them lasted just so long as they failed to make " The Immortal Hour " pay. By the time it had begun, as at last it did, to be successful, our interest in the theatre lapsed.

Now there only remain one or two plays which were produced at the Lyric on special occasions.

One of the most important semi-private performances which we did at the Lyric was that of Gustav Holst's " Savitri," which was something of an event—at any rate, in the musical world. It was on the 24th of June 1921, and Mr. Arthur Bliss conducted. Until it was produced at Covent Garden about two years later, by the British National Opera Company, this was the only performance of the opera ever given. I am not competent to describe the music. To those who do not know Holst's music, I should simply be unintelligible; to those who do I should be ridiculous. But I suppose it is fairly safe to say it is something like plain-song



ENGINEER: DESIGN BY DORIS ZINKEISEN FOR "THE INSECT PLAY"



MRS. CRICKET: DESIGN BY DORIS ZINKEISEN FOR "THE INSECT PLAY"

in most of the recitative passages. The story of the opera is from the Mahabharata—the great Indian epic; and what I might almost call the "levelness" of the music gave an extraordinary force to the slow tragedy of the tale. There are only three characters: Dorothy Silk played Savitri, and Stewart Wilson and Clive Carey played Death and Savitri's husband. The scenery, of course, was by Lovat Fraser; and he caught wonderfully the spirit of the thing, different as it was from what he was used to doing at that time.

I cannot, I am afraid, refer to all the performances given at the Lyric by the Phœnix Society: there are far too many. The Phœnix practically started at the Lyric. All its early productions were staged there; and many other producing societies, too, such as the Stage Society and the Three Hundred Club. I have always welcomed these visitors; and I am sorry that the present boom in producing clubs should have driven them mostly into more palatial quarters. For there is a lot to be said for keeping the audience at these private performances as small as possible: if you don't, they are inclined to keep themselves small. And moreover, most of the plays which Sunday Societies do are far better suited to a small theatre than a large one.

Of the first production of the Three Hundred Club, I think I must say something, since I produced it myself. This was "The Discovery," by Sheridan's mother. It is a brilliant comedy, but was not, as it stood, suited for the stage; and accordingly I sent it to that very witty writer, Mr. Aldous Huxley, to re-write for me. Very excellently he did it: some of his dialogue was almost *too* eighteenth century to be genuine! Perhaps the best thing of all was when he made a character refer to the Alps as "those arid and hideous protuberances!" But the fault of the play as a whole was that it was too long; and if it is ever produced on the commercial

stage (as I see no reason why it should not be) it will certainly have to be cut.

It was difficult to do much with the scenery in this play, as the Three Hundred Club was a new society, and dependent for its resources on the courage of its founder, Mrs. Geoffrey Whitworth. But we did the best that we could; and I don't think the Lyric is given to spending too much on costume and scenery, as I hope you will agree. Since then, I am glad to say, the Three Hundred Club has become a promising venture, and is at the time of writing just starting on its second season. It does not exist, like the Phœnix, for the revival of old plays (" The Discovery " was an exception, justified by Mr. Huxley's part-authorship), but for the production of plays by young living Englishmen—plays, as its prospectus puts it, " likely to appeal in the first instance only to a small audience." Thus it certainly has its function, even if only to save conscientious managers from bankruptcy.

Curiously enough, the record takings for a single house at the Lyric were not, as you might think, those of a night during the run of " The Beggar's Opera," but were at a matinee which comes into this " Roundabouts " section. It was the matinee given by the Portmadoc Players on 26th February 1924. I found this curious and enterprising little company when I was on a visit to Wales in the summer of 1923; or at least, I cannot altogether say that I discovered them, as Mr. St. Loe Strachey had already written them up in the *Spectator*. I discovered them afresh, as it were. I had taken an old Plâs for the summer holidays, and it was suggested that the local company might give a performance in what was called the Brew-house, a very old stone room at the bottom of the house, with space to seat about fifty people, and (so it happened) a bit of the floor raised at one end to form an accidental stage. Across the back of this accidental

stage was a staircase, and from a beam in front a curtain could be hung. There were even facilities for entrances and exits, and all this quite accidental, for the room had been intended for the home brewing of beer and the smoking of salmon, and had no intention of being a little theatre. But its rough stone walls needed no scenery; on the stone floor of the stage one could even light a pretty passable imitation of a bonfire without any fear of burning the house down or choking the audience. A better setting for a village company I could hardly imagine; indeed, I wish we could have transported brew-house and all to London.

The performance was arranged, and I assumed the expression of politeness I hope I always wear at amateur theatricals. But I must say that I was astonished, both at the quality of the plays and of the acting. They did three one-act plays, the first being by Richard Hughes. I knew the play, but was agreeably surprised to see how it worked out in action. The second was a most amusing comedy by J. O. Francis, who is, I gather, dramatic laureate of English-speaking Wales. (I may mention that all the plays were in the English language.) The third, and to my mind the most interesting, was a kind of religious monologue, written by A. O. Roberts, the son of a former Nonconformist minister in the district. That this play, and especially the far too good arguments which are put in the mouth of the Devil, might shock the neighbourhood (as I believe it did) did not surprise me; but it had a sincerity and beauty which I thought could not fail to impress a London audience.

As for the acting, it was not finished, of course; but it had sincerity and natural ability, which very well suited the plays they did.

The company took supper with me, and I inquired into their origin. Roughly, it was this. They had been launched

a few months before by Richard Hughes and A. O. Roberts on a capital of five pounds—which made even the Lyric seem a plutocratic enterprise ! Apparently all over Wales the dramatic movement is very keen: most villages have one, or sometimes two or three, companies, and act in Welsh to crowded houses plays generally written by a local bard. These companies have appeared quite spontaneously. There is no squire's lady or moneyed highbrow behind them. Indeed, the gentry have hardly heard of their existence. For in that topsy-turvy Principality it seems to be the peasants who keep the arts going, and squires are often nothing like so well educated as their own beaters and ploughboys.

Mr. Hughes and Mr. Roberts had the idea that if they could form a company of slightly wider activities, to pick stars out of the village companies in a small district and get them to work together, and if the same process was repeated in other districts, and then a fresh amalgamation was made, and so on, they might gradually evolve that National Company on which so many Welshmen have hitherto unavailingly set their hearts. There could be no doubt whatever that their experiment was, so far, a success.

I was so interested in the whole scheme that I got my fellow-directors to offer the Players the free use of our theatre for a series of matinees. They were, of course, to take their own financial risk, but we would charge them no rent. As, however, by this time their five pounds' capital had been reduced by outlay on necessary apparatus, etc., to very little more than three pounds ten shillings, they had to decide in the end only to give one performance. Even that, as I told them, would probably mount up to a risk of several hundred pounds, with the company to transport and house and everything; but they were not to be daunted. Hughes came to London, and worked for several months at the unfamiliar task of theatrical organization: he got to-

gether a committee, of which Mrs. Geoffrey Whitworth (who now runs the Three Hundred Club) was a prominent member. The Welsh Colony in London was canvassed, and proved most enthusiastic: a Welsh hotel-keeper even put up the company at his hotel entirely free for a week.

The Press was as intrigued by the whole affair as I had been; and I believe, as a matter of fact, the Players could have successfully taken the risk of several matinees. As it was, the house was packed twenty minutes before the curtain went up. Lloyd George was there, and many other prominent Welshmen. The Prince of Wales sent messages of goodwill: and the whole thing went off with a swing. The actors thoroughly enjoyed themselves, and seemed absolutely guiltless of stage-fright, although I afterwards heard that this was only their third appearance on any stage ! They came, moreover, through the fire of Press criticism extremely well, although many papers insisted on regarding them—in spite of their disclaimers—as being themselves a representative Welsh National Company, and compared them with the Abbey Players! Of course, such comparison was bound to be to their disadvantage, but it was really a very great compliment that it should be made at all. And the performance certainly proved Mr. Hughes's and Mr. Roberts's belief that in Wales there is quite amazingly good material to pick from, when their National Company itself finally comes into existence. I hope most sincerely that that will be soon; and that tribal jealousy, and similar personal factors won't hinder the process of amalgamation at which they aim from taking place.

And even after all the expenses were paid, they went back to Wales with an increased capital, as well as with increased confidence and kudos.

CHAPTER NINE

They

Me and Them—A *Société Anonyme*—The Business Management—Behind the Curtain—Lovat Fraser—In at the first View Halloo—His Passion for Beauty—His great Gifts—His Death—William Nicholson—Doris Zinkeisen—George Sheringham—Victor Hembrow—An Artist in Sandwiches—Music—Frederic Austin—Goossens—The Sisters Chaplin—Arthur Bliss—His Sunday Concerts—His Free Treat—Our Authors—The Actors—A Digression on Sentiment—Baddeley, Banks, Evans, Loraine, Marshall, Nelis, Pitt-Chatham, Ranalow, Rea, and Seyler: a glorious company—More about Pitt-Chatham—"May no one ever catch me Swanking!"—The Audience—The Critics.

IX

EVEN quite experienced authors, justly satisfied that anything they write (however autobiographical) will strike a note of joyful response in the breasts of all their readers, must sometimes feel a sense of relief when they can escape for a space from the ubiquitous and irrepressible " I " and " Me." So I look cheerfully at the title which I am giving this chapter, though I know it is going to be a chapter beset with pitfalls.

It must not, if I can help it, develop into a mere *catalogue raisonné* of all my friends and helpers; and yet I know at the same time that in avoiding this difficulty I shall omit to mention several to whom my gratitude is none the less due, and I hope they will accept in the spirit in which it is offered this the only intimation!

You will see, as you read, that there is one thing in which the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, can legitimately take pride —it has been the fortunate means of helping to build up and sustain many well-deserved reputations. It is not too vain a boast to say that to have acted, or sung, or designed scenery, or composed, for the entertainments that have been given there, is recognized in wider and more lucrative spheres as something in the nature of a respectable passport.

Let me begin my pæan of praise with a part of my establishment whose services may often pass unrecorded and unsung: those who deal with the difficult and dangerous financial side of the enterprise.

My shareholders would wish, I think, to remain incognito: a veritable *Société Anonyme*. They came into the venture as philanthropists, and philanthropists I shall see that they remain! During the first chapter you have been told of the

dastardly return which by a strange chance has been done to them.

Of my fellow directors, Arnold Bennett and Alistair Taylor, I have already spoken; but I may say again that it is only by their shrewdness and guidance that an unique adventure of this kind (producing plays with really no regard at all to the main chance), has survived seven years with its capital intact. They have, both of them, had their full share of worry and responsibility; and, by the terms on which they entered the concern, they have given themselves no opportunity of any material profit, and very little of any of the rewards of fame.

Throughout the period they have been assisted on the business side by Mr. A. P. Horne, for very many years the trusted private secretary of Sir George Alexander, and by Captain Pilbeam, the Secretary of our company. To their devotion and enthusiasm much of our success is due; and with them I would couple my long-suffering Stage Manager, Mr. Stephen Thomas. A Stage Manager is a man who bears the brunt and the blame of everything that may happen to go wrong. His work is unseen by the public, and far too often unrewarded by any word of praise from anyone. He is in control of the entire stage staff; and anyone who knows anything about theatre economics will admit that *some* praise must be Thomas's due, when I say that practically our entire staff from the Master Carpenter downwards has the same personnel to-day as when we started seven years ago!

I will talk next, if I may, about that branch of our work which comes under the heading of Stage Decoration. I don't do so because I regard it necessarily as the most important side of our work, but because at Hammersmith it enjoys a very particular vogue. I made it an essential part of my policy when I started the theatre that in every play the costumes and scenery should be specially designed by an artist; and

(whether it can be claimed or not that our consistent policy has helped towards it) it is a fact that during the last few years the Press and the Public have at length begun to pay due recognition to the artist-decorator in the theatre.

Don't misunderstand me: take careful note of the word "consistent," for I know, of course, that in special and individual cases it was done before (and in saying this I think particularly of the fine work which Craig did for some of his mother's productions, and the designs carried out for Granville-Barker by such artists as Albert Rutherston and Norman Wilkinson before the War).

I well know, too, that if our little theatre is remembered at all in the years to come it will be largely in connection with the name of that great artist-designer so much of whose best work was bound up with its fortunes, and who from the very beginning loved this theatre as much as all its adherents loved him—I mean, of course, Claud Lovat Fraser whom all his friends called Lovat. My first introduction to his work was made, I think, through Enid Bagnold (now Lady Jones), who had the taste to make a collection of it long before it was known to any but a very few people; but he and I had been friends since about 1916, when he returned badly wounded—it is not too much to say mortally wounded—from the War.

I know that he was the first person I took to see the theatre with my wife, though I think that we gathered up Athene Seyler on our way. I expect so, for he had a genius for friendship, of which both Athene Seyler and Karsavina won a big share. With all its queerness and uncouthness, the theatre appealed to him at once, and I remember that he took out his sketch-book, sitting in the middle of its squalor, and began to make a dozen plans for what could be carried out there scenically. Of his actual work I have written in other places; but there was not a detail in which he did not give

me his help, and advice, and encouragement. So much has been written about him—there are indeed two books devoted entirely to his life and work—that I feel there is nothing much more that I can add; but I think I might reprint here a letter which I wrote to Edwin Evans for his paper and at his request very shortly after Lovat's death :

" My dear Evans,

" You ask me to write for you and for your paper a few lines about Lovat Fraser.

" The personal sense of grief which I feel is so bitter, so poignant, that I can find no relief in words. As a rule, when one has reached middle age, one is granted a sort of callousness which enables one to receive with astonishing equanimity the news of a friend's death. But somehow with regard to Lovat it doesn't work, and I know that I am not alone in feeling this. Yet I know also that in his life, and even in his death, there is no cause for tears, but for exceeding great joy.

" Mud! That was what Lovat hated—it was the word he used as his severest form of condemnation—for pictures, plays, scenery, which offended him. He did not believe that the world was mud-coloured, nor that nature could best be reflected upon the stage in dun.

" And so he came to design his ' futúrist ' scenery and dresses.

" (Please be so good as to put the accent on the second syllable—it is odd, but true, that people who are fond of misapplying words are given to mispronouncing them also.) Lately the condemnation was not so common—anyway, it doesn't matter much now. Also, perhaps, if to see the ocean beyond the scum is to be a futurist, he was one.

" Lovat loved beauty and colour and truth, and those who saw his expression of them were apt in time to begin to love them too—even the baser sort of dramatic critics whose

eyes are worried with chronic mental dyspepsia, and no wonder, poor things!

" I dread to think that he is irreplaceable—it is so necessary that somebody should replace him. But the gifts that he must have! Draughtsmanship, a sense of colour, patience, humility, humour, diligence, honesty; a working knowledge of carpentry, architecture, of the costume of every century, lighting, grouping, movement, dancing, music; of the vast dramatic literature of this country, France, Italy, Spain and Germany; he must be able to write and lecture well and argue better, to receive rebuffs with a smile, to undo half that he has done at a moment's notice at the bidding of some economist . . . and all these *he* had, this boy, who was always tired and always laughing, always in pain and always trying to make other people happy—who, at the age of thirty-one—with five years of the War taken from his life—has left behind him a collection of several hundred drawings and paintings, of scene models, of illustrated books, which will be for ever one of the proudest possessions of his country. *Requiescat in pace.* He may."

Another great artist who has honoured me with his help, though not actually at Hammersmith, is William Nicholson, whose work, perhaps is nearest akin to that of Fraser, and to whose example and influence Fraser doubtless owed a great deal. It is too much to expect of him who is an older man, with tremendous calls upon his time and energies, to devote much of them to the service of the theatre; nor indeed has he ever been able to acquire the technical knowledge which in many cases (if not in all) is necessary; but his work for " Polly " was delightful. I am glad to know that many of his designs have been acquired for the Nation, and hang for all times beside those of Lovat's in the British Museum at South Kensington.

Doris Zinkeisen, then a student at the Royal Academy School and a pupil especially of Charles Sims, came to me unannounced with a portfolio of drawings under her arm just when I had undertaken the hazardous experiment of directing the fortunes of the Liverpool Repertory Company for a year. I was fortunate enough to be able to see at once that she had great talent for stage decoration, and merely required direction and experience to make a very good shot at success if she adopted it as a profession. I planted her at Liverpool in the scene-painter's shop, and told her to supervise all the scenery for all the plays. It was no easy undertaking. In the first place, Liverpool preferred old scenery to new; they were under the necessity of exercising the most rigid economy, and the utmost they would allow her to do was to re-furbish their old stuff. However, Miss Zinkeisen set to work undaunted and some very queer effects she managed to produce! But she learnt a great deal about her job, as I think everybody who remembers "The Way of the World" (and especially the second act, representing a scene in St. James' Park), will acknowledge. Her violence (which is the proper though somewhat embarrassing accompaniment of extreme youth) is being toned down, and I think she will go far.

But the truest successor to Lovat Fraser (though he is in no sense an imitator, his style being entirely distinct), is George Sheringham, whose scenery for "Midsummer Madness" and for "The Duenna" has compelled almost universal, and I think thoroughly well-deserved, admiration. I shall be very much surprised if Mr. Sheringham's work will not prove to have as great an influence on the Modern Theatre as that of any artist of European reputation.

I must not forget—I should be ungrateful indeed if I did!—to pay a special tribute to Mr. Victor Hembrow, who from the beginning has carried out for me the scenery

POSTER BY DORIS ZINKEISEN

of all these artists, and has made their models. There is certainly no more able scene painter in this or any other country: and he is still a very young man.

It is an extremely difficult matter (or so it seems to me) to tell from pictures and drawings to what extent a painter may or may not have a special gift for scenic design. That is the great trouble; for English artists have extraordinarily few opportunities for experiments in this direction, and it is a great grief to me that I personally have not larger opportunities for making experiments. We hope always that our successful experiments may in time have a much wider influence. It seems to me that the scene-painting in a great many of what are known as the commercial theatres would gain much in beauty if they would have recourse to finer artists; and that is true of decoration generally, not only in the theatre. The services of these young artists, many of whom find the struggle for existence a very difficult one, could surely be utilized much more by the great commercia firms of this country. Lovat Fraser did, as is well known, a good deal of work in textile designs: I often wish that a great firm like Lyons would consult someone who has had experience like mine as to artists they might employ in the carrying out of the decorations of their otherwise admirable tea-shops. Perhaps they will not thank me for offering them gratuitously this suggestion! But I am quite sure that in the long run their customers would, if they accepted it. A white coffee and a scone and butter is really *not* a more palatable meal when it has to be eaten in an extended marble bathroom!

As I have said, one has to choose one's artists by a process of rather fortuitous deduction. I have just selected, as I write, a gentleman to do the scenery and dresses for " Robert Burns " because of his skill for expressing himself in sandwiches ! (At any rate, it was behind a counter of sandwiches

of his own designing that I found him . . . at one of those pleasant gatherings known as "Elsa Lanchester's select evenings.") At once, when I asked for a sandwich and a cup of coffee and was handed by him a sandwich concocted of thin brown bread and butter, mushrooms and *pâté de foie gras*, and at the same time a cup of coffee which—oh, all too rare event!—really answered to its description, I knew that I was in the presence of an artist-caterer! I was not surprised to learn that as a side line he was an artist in oil paintings as well; but it was really his sandwiches which have pushed him into a third occupation.

I had no idea, when I came to Hammersmith, how large a part music was to play in our scheme. I had not, indeed, thought very much about opera, except that its presentation was nearly always an outrage to the eye, until I had a year or so ago undertaken a production of "The Marriage of Figaro" for Sir Thomas Beecham. In it Mr. Frederic Austin was taking the part of the Count Almaviva, and one day he was kind enough to take me home with him to dine, to play for me some of his own compositions (which attracted me very much indeed), and to give me his views on the future of Opera in this country; and especially in what way the future might be bettered for English singers and English music. That was, of course, the genesis of the very little we have been able to do at Hammersmith in this direction. With my own theories on the subject I will deal in another place; but I would like to say here how much I owe to Austin for all his help. He is a man who is able to see very clearly many sides of a case, and especially to grasp (as people connected with Opera can very rarely grasp), how much of its lack of attraction for a great many people in this country is due to the fact that its essential qualities, other than the music, are often so sadly neglected. I have lost him for the moment at Hammersmith, as he is devoting himself and his great

capacity to the desperate struggle which the British National Opera Company is making for recognition; but I feel that he can never be away from Hammersmith for very long at a time.

It would be going a little too far to claim Eugène Goossens as a Hammersmithite, but he has on more than one occasion lent us his brilliant gifts as a conductor, and especially for the first few weeks of " The Beggar's Opera." I cherish an ambition that one day we may be able to produce an original work from his pen, though up to now he has struggled under the usual composer's difficulty of finding a suitable libretto.

But Hammersmithites the three sisters Chaplin undoubtedly can be claimed to be, after their three and a half years' leading of the orchestra in "The Beggar's Opera." Their popularity with our audiences was unbounded, and a tribute, I am sure, to the great work which they have done for many years past in keeping up an interest in our beautiful old English music.

I came across the work of Mr. Alfred Reynolds first in listening to his quite admirable score for " Love in a Village" by the Mayfair Operatic Society (a company of enthusiastic amateurs devoted to the resuscitation of the forgotten English operas of the eighteenth century), and I was glad of the opportunity which I was able to give him in our present revival of " The Duenna."

Mr. Arthur Bliss, now in Canada, arranged the music for " As You Like It " and also for " La Serva Padrona." He also conducted for us in the latter—the first time he ever conducted for anyone. I hope it was because he was so fond of us that he determined to spend his Sunday evenings at Hammersmith as well as the whole of the rest of the week, and organized there a series of classical Sunday concerts, which helped to increase his reputation, but I am afraid contributed very little to his financial betterment: for some-

how, I cannot tell why, the Lyric, Hammersmith, is not considered a place in which to spend a pleasant Sunday musical evening. But Bliss is a man of the greatest generosity and enthusiasm, and they never could have been a success if it had not been for him. Lovat Fraser, too, did settings which held and charmed the eye without distracting from the attention required by the ear. In 1920 these concerts were still going strong, and we decided to give a special revival performance of " La Serva Padrona." But at the last moment we found that we were up against the L.C.C.: Sunday concerts, paid for at the door, are allowable, but there must be no *dramatic* performance in them. We ran about London in panic, trying to find some way out of the difficulty. It was suggested that we should give the opera in ordinary clothes —that we should do a concert version of it without action— that we should sacrifice Lovat's sets. But all these proposals were too monstrous for us to be content with them. Rather than that, we would have been willing to give up the idea of the performance, as the L.C.C. insisted. And so, in the middle of the concert, Arthur Bliss got up to announce that unfortunately, owing to official action, the performance could not take place, and the concert would be filled up with other items. A general groan went round the house; but Bliss soon checked it by saying that the performance would be given next Sunday—*free*. All ticket-holders at this concert would be given a free seat if they asked for it at the box-office on the way out ! This was extraordinarily generous of him, and he stood all the expenses of that performance himself. And a great success it was.

I wish indeed that I could claim that many modern English playwrights have made or added greatly to their reputations by their work at Hammersmith, but that, alas! up to now has not been the case. It is not a bad claim, of course, that we have added to the reputations of authors

dead and yet living; and that is a claim which can fully be sustained, as the new editions of Gay and Congreve and Sheridan will amply prove. But the reputation of Milne and Ervine rest on other and surer foundations; and possibly it is true to say that the Lyric Theatre owes a great deal more to Drinkwater than Drinkwater to the Lyric Theatre—some credit, however, we may claim, as Mr. Drinkwater has on more than one occasion generously acknowledged. Nor have we seen the end of Drinkwater yet. But it must not be forgotten that "Abraham Lincoln" was not really a Lyric production at all: it was brought to the theatre ready-made by Mr. Barry Jackson.

As for Mr. Clifford Bax, his reputation as a playwright (as he will be the first to acknowledge) is still to be made; though he has shown many graceful signs of promise.

And now for a very important "they," the actors, without whose help a theatre can never have life or being.

How shall I begin, when the long list of their names rises to my memory? You will find all of them, I think, in the programmes reprinted at the end of the book; and I hope there are still people who pass a winter's evening in the sentimental pleasure of reading through old programmes. There are not so many, I am afraid, as there used to be: that *kind* of enthusiasm for the theatre seems to have passed away, to be replaced by an enthusiasm which is more discriminating, and yet, one hopes, none the less real. One hears now more of the theatre as an aid to education, of the theatre as a tonic; but are there still any people left who love the theatre with a simple faith just because it *is* the theatre, and ask no questions about it?

I remember when I was a boy that a schoolfellow of mine, who died a young, unwilling, and not very successful member of the Stock Exchange, told me that often in the holidays he liked to spend a pleasant afternoon sitting by courtesy

of the local manager in the stalls of the theatre in the small country town where he lived; and the fact that there was very seldom a performance there made comparatively little difference to his enjoyment. He taught himself the geography of England by mapping out imaginary tours for his favourite plays and players !—Is there any of that spirit left among the Youth of England now, I wonder ? Probably no one exists who would be satisfied with so mild and gentle an amusement !

How shall I begin, then ? I hope no actor that I have forgotten has a name beginning with an A, for the name that springs to my mind is the honoured theatrical name of Baddeley. Angela Baddeley and her sister Hermione were thirteen and eleven years old when they appeared first in Mr. Milne's " Make-Believe," and established themselves as firm favourites in the theatre. Hermione has paid me flitting visits since, though she has made most of her reputation elsewhere. But Angela is now a veteran of twenty and yet with me; and I venture to prophesy that she will find a position equal to that of her sister, though on rather different lines.

Almost the first engagement that I made was that of Mr. Herbert Marshall, who, as well as Mr. Leslie Banks, played in my first play and in many others. I was not, of course, able to keep either of them very long; that is one of the tragedies of a small theatre, which the actors must leave to make their fortunes in the sordid sense of the word.

I must give to Sir Barry Jackson the credit, much as I should like to claim it, of the discovery of Mr. Rea. As Abraham Lincoln he was incomparable; but appearing for me in one or two plays afterwards he proved himself by no means a one-part actor.

I think I shall claim a large share in the making of the reputation of Miss Athene Seyler: partly because hers is a

reputation which is dear to me, and partly because she is a young lady who can well stand up for herself if my claims are at all arrogant. Of course, when I fluttered the dovecots by choosing her for Rosalind, she was already known as an actress of brilliant comic gifts; but I think that I was the first to prove how seriously those gifts might be taken.

Of Sylvia Nelis I have already spoken.

It shall go down for ever to the glory of Hammersmith that two of the greatest actresses of this century have been its leading ladies—Marie Tempest and Edith Evans.

I generally make it a matter of principle to choose the play first, and rely on my judgment and good fortune for the casting. But I confess that in " The Way of the World " I departed from this practice. I could think of no substitute for Edith Evans' Millamant; I did not flatter myself that our revival could possibly draw the town without it. Miss Evans was writhing at Birmingham as the Serpent in the Garden of Eden when I sent her the prepaid wire which was to settle the matter; and I like to think that somewhere in the Shades Congreve, overcoming for a moment his dislike of the English theatre, really grew as excited as I was, waiting for her reply. It is, too, no little source of pride to me to imagine that this great part has helped her in her career a little.

Nor would I like to forget the obligation I am under to Robert Loraine, whose great gifts and dignity were placed ungrudgingly by him at my service. For when Hammersmith enjoys the advantage of seeing an actor or actress there of his reputation and standing, they do so at the expense to him of a considerable financial sacrifice. That is a necessary outcome of the economic situation which, in spite of occasional success, must always prevail there. It is a tribute to the devotion of English actors and actresses that it is a sacrifice which they are always willing to make when they feel

that a cause justifies it. Without it such institutions as the Old Vic., the Everyman Theatre, and The Phœnix and Stage Societies would be impossible. It is the only form of subsidy which the theatre in this country receives.

Of Frederic Ranalow I have already spoken, and indeed there is not an actor or an actress who has appeared with me whose loyalty and service I would not like to acknowledge individually; but they will understand the delicacy I feel in praising them in front of their faces, as it were!

But I must say a word of one who also, like Lovat, left us suddenly in the bright beginnings of his career.

William Pitt-Chatham made, I think, his first appearance as an actor with me in a revival of "Make-Believe" at Liverpool. Afterwards he took Ranalow's part on a lengthy tour of "The Beggar's Opera." He took it with grace and distinction. He was a lovable and delightful character. Of how he came to be in such a short time the manager of a theatre I have explained elsewhere. He might have been called "Bill" by his intimates: he was the sort of man whom that affectionate short name would have suited very well. For some reason or other, I don't know what it was, everybody called him "Bobby"; and duke or dustman, he called nearly everybody "George," or "Monsieur le Duc" if they looked at all pretentious, or carried an air of wishing to terrify. It was his only method of criticism, and it never had to be employed for very long. Pride quickly melted before his cheery smile.

Dead at the age of thirty-eight, five years of that short life spent soldiering, and yet in a position which many would envy, playing the chief part in (and to a great extent controlling) the destinies of a great London theatre, what manner of man was this?

A great singer, a fine actor, the possessor of a brilliant business capacity? Truth compels me to say that he was

none of these things, and he would have laughed at any such claim. " No thank you, George! Whatever happens to me, pray God no one ever catches me swanking," I heard him say shortly before his death, and that, sincerely uttered, is not such a bad prayer either, as I am sure the Recording Angel would willingly testify.

A beautiful manly singing voice he had, always true, graceful and attractive; and he had what is rare in too many singers, an unerringly right instinct for stress and phrasing and a desire to share with his audience a clear understanding of what he was singing about.

He hadn't yet the experience to be a very good actor, but I think he would have become one. It was a great ambition of his, and there was no trouble he would not have taken to achieve that ambition. But his simple enjoyment in his work, the buoyancy of his good spirits were infectious and delightful.

Self-analysis was a vice from which he was singularly free; he would have been extremely puzzled had he been asked to explain in a few choice words his faith and ideals. . . . I can hear him saying to some ruthless publicity agent: " I leave it to you, George." But in spite of that he had them both, a touching simple faith that the world was intended to be a very jolly place, full of extraordinarily good chaps and " topping " girls, and that it was his business, as far as in him lay, to leave the world at any rate an even jollier place than he had found it.

His faith and his ideals were cruelly, it would seem almost malignantly, assaulted; but to no purpose. Only a year before he died he lost his only son, a charming little boy to whom he was passionately devoted; before that he had faced all the horrors of war. These assaults he felt, painfully but without a trace of bitterness. There were other fellows always who had worse troubles than he had, who were up against it,

were too shy to ask and had to be helped. It was his duty to help them, *that* he took as a matter of course. And as he had had " the luck " to find himself in a position to help others, he felt that it was his plain duty to do it—and there is a crowd of witnesses to tell us that he did.

But he was wrong about one thing—it wasn't just " luck" that had put him in his position. It was talent; not his talent for acting or singing or leadership of men, perhaps, but none the less: for the gift of friendship is a talent, just as much as any other, and every bit as rare! This talent he possessed in an amazing degree, and he used it to the full —never consciously, and always for the sake of others first. If I may speak for a moment of myself, I can testify to it; and so can a hundred others—actors, scene-shifters, writers, composers, chorus girls. I don't know that he was really quite certain, for instance, that my choice of helpers was always the right one: he had a suspicion, I know, for example, that the old jolly way of carrying out scenic effects, which pleased a great many jolly people, must have a great deal more in it than I would allow; but I was his friend, and therefore I must have my own way, and " I only hope you're right, George ! "

And this was the kind of man whose character I have tried to sketch, however inadequately. Fate has perhaps spared many more able, but few more lovable. He leaves behind him a memory which many may envy but none grudge.

His title to fame (which he never, I think, very much coveted) may rest more on his singing of German Lieder, for which he had an exquisite gift, exercised—of course, before the War—in London, Berlin, and more especially St. Petersburg (where his popularity was very great), than in his brief career on the London stage. He leaves behind him a devoted and brilliant wife, whom he married very

early in life, and a young daughter who already shows signs of following with success in her father's footsteps.

And now of " Them " there remain two varieties to complete the circle.

There is only one other theatre in London which can boast such a remarkable audience as ours: I mean, of course, the Old Vic. Generous, loyal, faithful, jealous of our honour and reputation, but never afraid to complain when they feel that the standard is not being maintained (as my letter book would fully show): and proud a little, I think, too, of feeling (and rightly feeling) they have done a great deal to help achieve it.

With our professional critics I have had (and shall continue to have) many a tussle, though my quarrels with them are seldom openly conducted, and my loud imprecations on their lack of agreement with everything I do can seldom be heard beyond the bathroom door; but I feel (and feel very sincerely) that as a body they are unprejudicially actuated by one motive, and that is the improvement of the English Theatre. They have all (and with reason !) terrible doubts and difficulties to contend with; but believe me, when they know that the great mass of public opinion is determined on the elevation of the standard of public entertainment, they will be found one and all on the side of the angels.

Indeed, if there is one thing that I have been struck by in the theatre world it is the entire lack of anything like disdain or jealousy. Mine has been, I know, the good fortune to have a little success in a particular direction of which a great many of my fellow managers have been envious, yet from not one of them have I ever met with a word of unkindness, nor do I believe that any has been ever felt, much less expressed.

CHAPTER TEN

"The Way of the World"

"The Beggar's Opera" Revival Ends at Last —Edith Evans—"The Merry Wives of Windsor"—The Way of the Wig-Snatcher— Hope for the Classics.

X

THE run of " The Beggar's Opera " ended on 17th December 1923, and with it ended many ghostly runs that had never begun. A great deal of the programme I had had in mind when " The Beggar's Opera " had started had to be scrapped, as the years rolled by and no new programme was needed. Modern plays lying in my drawer during that historic run had time to grow old-fashioned, and did. It was only old plays which stood the test of time, and the first revival I intended to do was " The Way of the World."

I have told you elsewhere how determined I was that Millamant should be played by Miss Edith Evans, and how I telegraphed to her at Birmingham to ask her to do it. I believe it is Mr. George Moore who can claim the credit for Miss Evans having gone on the stage at all: he saw her performing as an amateur in " Troilus and Cressida," and added the weight of persuasion to her natural inclinations. For it must not be imagined that the idea was a new one to her; indeed, from childhood she had been passionately devoted to the stage and all concerned with it.

I came across the other day a new book of criticism (" The Critic's Armoury," by Cyril Falls), in which was a chapter on William Congreve. The book had only been published a month or so, but some of the work in it was evidently written a good while ago, for the author, in his essay on Congreve, strongly recommends his plays, and " The Way of the World " especially, to the notice of theatrical revivalists. He wrote, in fact, before we had, like the Irishman, taken his advice in advance; and he has added a graceful footnote to say that " since this was written we have had the

delight of seeing Millamant played by an actress of whom I should say that she was born for the rôle, did it not appear that she was born to play well *any* rôle." Miss Evans certainly deserves such praise; and it was amusing to see Mr. Falls prophesying us very much the success we had.

But, although " The Way of the World " was the first play I intended to do, it was not the first play I actually did. There were six weeks of the Christmas season to be filled in, and William Congreve certainly cannot conveniently be disguised as Father Christmas, nor his bay leaves festooned with holly and mistletoe. Accordingly I invited Mr. Bridges Adams to come and produce " The Merry Wives of Windsor " for us as a stop-gap. I gave him an entirely free hand, and cannot claim any credit for the production he did, except that of supplying the theatre and most of the cast. Miss Evans, of course, was Mistress Page—that went without saying; and there could hardly be much argument as to whether Miss Elsie French was to play Mrs. Quickly or no. Falstaff was, as he always is, the biggest problem. The Falstaff of " The Merry Wives " is not, and cannot be made, the same character as the Falstaff of " Henry IV "; for the part in the sequel is very much more broadly and unsympathetically drawn. Shakespeare is said to have written the play in a fortnight, and in this respect, at any rate, it shows it. But I was determined not to have the usual low-clown Falstaff, with a padded and unconvincing belly, and a roaring and unintelligent utterance; and in securing Mr. Roy Byford for the part, who played it without any padding at all, and with an extraordinary wealth of characterization and feeling, I think I was extremely lucky. There were moments of Falstaff's tornado speeches which he made as effective as anything in the play.

For Mistress Ford, Dorothy Green was cast; it needed a bold and competent actress to play against Edith Evans,

MRS. FAINALL : DESIGN BY DORIS ZINKEISEN FOR "THE WAY OF THE WORLD"

WITWOUD : DESIGN BY DORIS ZINKEISEN FOR "THE WAY OF THE WORLD"

and Miss Green quite held her own. Miss Green (of whose talents Mr. Bridges Adams has always been a great advocate) had made a great name in Shakespeare Festivals at Stratford, both under Mr. Adams and previously with Sir Frank Benson. I had met her first in an amusing and instructive visit we paid under his auspices to play Shakespeare and Sheridan in the West Indies, Matheson Lang being also of our jolly company. It was a year before the great earthquake, when Jamaica and Trinidad were still gardens of Eden, where we could live in the utmost luxury on the most modest salaries. Alas, I fear those days are beyond recall.

I think it was as good a cast as we have ever got together. Mr. Randle Ayrton's performance of Ford and Mr. Reginald Bach's Sir Hugh Evans were both extremely finished pieces of acting; and the result (I can say this fairly, seeing that I was not the producer myself and indeed only played quite a small part) was one of the most amusing shows I have ever seen. The *New Age*, usually so bitter, said: "See it at the Lyric, Hammersmith, and thank God, when you have finished laughing, for a play and a performance that is worthy of London. . . . I would like to keep the company at it, to show how Shakespeare should be played."

If a good play fails because it has not a good cast, it is equally true—and forgotten by many managers—that a good cast cannot possibly show *how* good it is without a good play. As I remember Miss Evans putting it once: "In acting Shakespeare or Congreve one can never put too much of a quality into a part: one has to call up every ounce of it in every corner of one's being: while with so many modern parts one has to hold oneself in all the time, putting into the *soufflé* only a teaspoonful of this and a pinch of that, or one will suddenly find the poor little part squashed flat on the floor under one's feet, like a beetle!" But even Miss Evans

could not put too much humour into Mistress Page, or too much fascination into Millamant; and Mr. Bridges Adams has just the right qualities for co-ordinating a good cast, and letting a good play run its course without a hitch.

All did not go without a hitch, however; but that was not Mr. Bridges Adams's fault, but Fate's—which unkind goddess soon gave Mr. Byford as violent a cold as if he had really been plunged in the Thames in a basket of dirty linen! And we had to call in a substitute. Mr. Scott Russell was the substitute; and he had hardly, by his excellent performance, lulled us back into a feeling of security when he, too, succumbed to the epidemic, and yet another Falstaff had to be looked for. This was Frank Cellier, and it was not till the middle of January that Mr. Byford was able to come back to his part again.

But, as I have said, " The Merry Wives " was only a stop-gap, and never intended to run more than six weeks. And though the laughter of the audience was as uproarious as that at any popular modern farce, the magic blight of Shakespeare's name settled heavily on the box-office, and we could not have run it for longer, even had that been our intention.

The history of " The Way of the World " has been very different to that of " The Beggar's Opera." Indeed, I think I can fairly say that its performance at the Lyric Theatre was the first real success it has ever had, except in the golden opinions of critics. This play, which Swinburne called " This unequalled and unapproachable masterpiece of English comedy "—of which Macaulay said that " Certain scenes in it are superior to anything that is found in the whole range of English comedy, from the Civil War downwards "—of which Hazlitt said, " The style of Congreve is inimitable, nay, perfect: it is the highest model of comic dialogue, every sentence is replete with sense and satire, conveyed in the

most polished and pointed terms"—this play by an author whom Dryden had hailed at twenty-four as "Shakespeare's equal in comedy" was a frost at its first production, has been seldom revived, and never before with success! Congreve himself was so much incensed at the reception of what he considered, and what undoubtedly was, his best play, that he threw up the sponge altogether and never wrote another.

I have little patience with those who keep repeating his unfortunate remark to Voltaire, to the effect that he despised literature, and thought it beneath his dignity as a fine gentleman. If this was true, he would not have worked hard at the play for two years before its production (as he did): in fact, he could not have written such a play at all if such had been his real sentiments. And probably more harm has been done to his reputation by the parrot-like repetition of this utterance of an affected foible than anyone could have guessed at the time.

"The Way of the World" is the greatest of all comedies of manners—a kind of comedy which Congreve himself defined in his dedication to the Earl of Montague in saying that his idea was "to design characters which should appear ridiculous, not so much through a natural folly as through an affected wit: a wit which, at the same time that it is affected, is also false." At the same time, it was a sort of reply to Jeremy Collier's attack on "the immorality and profaneness of the English stage." Its first unlucky production was at the Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre, where "The Beggar's Opera" afterwards appeared in 1700. The best possible cast was secured for it, including Betterton, Mrs. Barry, and Mrs. Bracegirdle (the secretly adored of Congreve).

You will readily see that in attempting to produce it again I had far greater need of faith than in the case of "The Beggar's Opera," for whereas "The Beggar's Opera" had

never failed to make the fortunes of all who handled it, " The Way of the World," in spite of the eulogies of the critics, had never failed to lead to bankruptcy. This I put down largely to its extremely complicated action—" a jungle of passionless intrigues "—which an ordinary audience finds hard to follow; and what an ordinary audience finds hard to follow it rejects altogether. I therefore burlesqued the plot considerably, and treated it as a joke. As " A. B. W." said in *The Times*, it was " a rattling, jaunty, jigging, almost jazzing revival. The play is fantasticated." That seemed to me the only thing to do; and I think I was justified in the result.

But no, that is hardly fair. I think, in discussing the character of Polly, I have mentioned how the character of Millamant ran away with its author; and that indeed is the case. What started as a comedy of manners is suddenly rapt from our sight in one of the most blinding visions of character that have ever been dramatized. And it was that which gave Miss Evans her real chance. The Millamant of that last final surrender to Mirabell is something far more than the Millamant who comes " full sail, with her fan spread, and her streamers out, and a shoal of fools for tenders ": it is a woman wittier, more fascinating, and more tender, probably, than has ever been seen off the stage or elsewhere on it. Here is no " character rendered ridiculous by its affected wit " : here is a character rendered sublime by the poignancy and the sincerity of its wit. And I repeat that there never has been on or off the stage a woman so sublime in the same way as Millamant: no one reading the play can fail to see this, and it is a most extraordinary tribute to Edith Evans that she was able to take on her shoulders the weight of such an enormous conception, and play it almost as if the conception were purely her own rather than the author's.

Nobody could find fault with Miss Evans—indeed, no-

MRS. MARWOOD: DESIGN BY DORIS ZINKEISEN FOR "THE WAY OF THE WORLD"

MIRABELL: DESIGN BY DORIS ZINKEISEN FOR "THE WAY OF THE WORLD"

body tried; though the rest of the cast were not altogether so kindly treated. Miss Margaret Yarde's Lady Wishfort was a frequent bone of contention; and though one critic gave her the palm for the piece, several others considered that she made it too farcical. But why, in heaven's name, shouldn't she ? She made it an outstanding piece of acting, and a piece of acting which fitted in perfectly well with the rest of the production. Even if it was not, perhaps, entirely Congreve's Lady Wishfort, it was a performance which justified itself simply and solely by its own excellence. Miss Yarde is in an unique position among contemporary actresses: she lights up any play in which she appears for a few moments, and yet there is hardly any play in which a part for her of any magnitude can be found! And except for Lady Wishfort, she has hardly ever had a chance of giving scope to her peculiar and inimitable gifts.

It would be ungracious indeed of me were I to pass over Mr. Robert Loraine's performance of Mirabell, even though I have paid tribute to it elsewhere. It needed a fine actor indeed to play the lover to Miss Evans's Millamant. And there was also in the cast Norman V. Norman, Scott Russell, Harold Anstruther, and Harold Scott, all of whose performances were excellent.

I must not forget also to mention the dancing of Miss Elsa Lanchester, condemned, though rather ingenuously condemned, by some critic on the ground that it was a mere "studio turn." She had it is true, done something very like it before, but it was always an eighteenth-century study, inspired by Hogarth's picture of "The Shrimp Girl," strictly an anachronism, it is true, but a very little one, and one that I admitted and suggested for a very sufficient reason. At the actual period of the play, solo dancing was unknown in this country, though examples of it were to be found in Paris. Lady Wishfort would probably have engaged a

troupe, but troupes of dancers though well within the means of a hostess in the reign of Queen Anne, were beyond the means of a producer of the classics in the reign of King George V.

In my case I have the excuse that the audience thoroughly enjoyed it.

Mr. Frederic Austin was again responsible for the music, which was played by a quartette of harpsichord, 'cello, violin and flute, dressed in the style of the play, and very agreeably they appealed both to eye and ear.

The song—one of the loveliest lyrics ever written—and one of the wittiest, was exquisitely sung by Miss Kathlyn Hilliard, one of our many Pollies. But, alas! its meaning, however clearly sung, could not penetrate to the ears of the audience unless previously familiar with its argument.

Our first night was 7th February 1924. Just before the curtain went up occurred one of those situations which are the joy of the publicity agent and the frenzy of the stage manager. Robert Loraine's wigs were stolen; the eighteenth century, with its wig-snatchers, was re-created indeed! A thief stopped the messenger who brought them outside the stage door, and representing himself as one of our myrmidons, relieved him of the extremely expensive parcel and made off with it into the night. Poor Loraine could not go on the stage as Mirabell in his own hair, and we had considerable difficulty in getting at such short notice a substitute for Clarkson's creations. But otherwise, no hitch occurred. The production was soon "in full sail," and bore on its course from the beginning of February till 28th June.

Its success, which was considerable, even financially, proved to me one thing: that, there is a public for the great classics of this country, if well acted and picturesquely presented. It is not a large public, perhaps three months

will always exhaust it. But it is encouraging to know that it exists, and I shall be very disappointed if I cannot eventually show at this theatre all the plays of Congreve, Sheridan and Goldsmith—even, as the appetite grows on what it feeds upon, of Dryden and my beloved Otway.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

"Midsummer Madness"

"Midsummer Madness": Lyric, 3rd July 1924 —11th October 1924

Old Plays and New—Modern Light Opera—Dame Nature and our Operatic Stage—The Blind Eye—"Midsummer Madness"—A Letter from Mr. Bax—A Bull among the Picadors—What Ailed the Critics?—Mr. Armstrong Gibbs—Marie Tempest and Ranalow—The Setting—My Unrepentance—The Future of the Musical Play—Gilbert and the Eighteenth Century.

XI

IN common with many other theatre managers, I have often been attacked by critics, professional and amateur, for not giving encouragement to modern authors and modern composers, who are willing and able, as they say, to provide entertainment of a high quality—entertainments which the great public in its turn is only too anxious to receive and appreciate. I have felt the justice of the attack; and acknowledge it. To revive classic examples is certainly not enough, although it is to do some service to those who still love them. Nor is it sufficient defence to for me say that I am setting examples from the dead that the living may follow. For, as the critics rightly say, it is no use the living following these examples ever so successfully if their work never sees the light. But, at any rate, it is equally unfair to suggest—as anyone who knows the risks will acknowledge—that in reviving old plays I am treading the safe and easy path. For, looked at theoretically, it is undeniable that success in any age is more easily achieved by new methods than old: that, contrary to the story of Aladdin, it is by rubbing *new* lamps that the genie of public favour is bound to our service.

But alas and alas! Where are those examples of modern workmanship, whose skill and aptitude the critics prate of so glibly, to be found? Not in my letter-box, certainly; not in the libraries of modern drama which lately have kept the printing presses perpetually abuzz; not in the drawers of the agents. In short, I am afraid they are only to be found in the imaginations of the critics.

Now, of course, I have said too much. I don't mean all that! I have already told you how I lit on "Abraham Lincoln" and on "John Ferguson"; and at the head of this

very chapter is the title of a third work by a modern author. All I mean is that good work by a modern is as hard to find as, shall we say, a really pretty dairymaid (a much overrated class). And it is unfair to suggest that I have spared, or will spare, any pains in looking for it: to find a worthy modern successor of the classics which I have revived is one of my greatest ambitions. But alas! the English public (and I am afraid this is often true of the critics also), though it is very fond of advocating experiments, shows extremely little curiosity to see them carried out. And though to make such experiments has always been my ambition and sincere desire, I have no wish to be overwhelmed with bankruptcy and obloquy in the pursuit of them! I have read and heard the music of score upon score of modern English light operas; but one and all of them have had some defect or other which has made their presentation practically impossible—at any rate, with the means at my disposal. Too many of them are imitations, pure and simple, of the operas of Gilbert and Sullivan. Or if the works possessed intrinsic merit, too often they were conceived on a scale which would have split the sides of Drury Lane—obvious impossibilities for our little stage and purse. Or if the scale was small enough, they required too great skill in their interpretation; for I am afraid that it must be admitted that in England the number of artists who can both sing and act is very strictly limited, and a musical play which requires exceptional skill in acting is almost an impossibility to cast from the ranks of our present theatrical community. I know that demand tends to increase supply; but nevertheless it is painfully true that when Dame Nature portioned her gifts to the light opera section of the English nation, she allowed the law of compensation to govern her actions in a most exasperating manner. To the young lady whom she chose to dower with the voice of a nightingale she added the ankles of a hippopotamus: to the

SCENE BY GEORGE SHERINGHAM FOR "MIDSUMMER MADNESS"

love-lilting tenor she added the forward presence of a Falstaff; and took great pains to ensure that blonde perfection should be dowered with the larynx of a musk-rat! There are exceptions, of course, as I handsomely admit; so let the swords of chivalry slip back into their scabbards. But no one who has had any experience of a round of auditions can deny that my indictment is truthful in the main.

Orchestral playing, I admit, is as highly skilled in this country as in any other; but its exponents demand, no doubt rightly, very high payment; and it is a common fault of light opera composers keeping the sharp eye of economy fixed on the stage, to turn a very blind eye on the orchestra. They contract their cast to limits which must please even the most niggardly manager; but think nothing of expecting him to provide them with an orchestra of thirty or forty instruments!

But generally, however, the fault does not lie with the composer, whether in these or any other respects. It is the libretto which is weak. I am absolutely convinced that were anyone to write a really appealing libretto, you could take your equal choice of a dozen young English musicians to look successfully after the music. There are fewer good librettos written in England than there are fountains in the Sahara.

When Clifford Bax read to me a few years ago his "Midsummer Madness" I thought I had found a really admirable libretto within the limits which he himself had set to it; in fact, I believe I thought so far more strongly than he did himself. I think so still, although the stars in their courses have fought against its fulfilling my expectations. At any rate, I determined that I would try to do it; and I must confess (without bitterness, I hope) that in doing so I looked forward to every encouragement—to the help and support of those critics who had urged me to take exactly that step—

who had accused me, indeed, of poltroonery for not doing so. How I was disappointed the letter which I received from Mr. Bax long after the event will explain:

" My dear Playfair,

" You ask me to say why, in my opinion, ' Midsummer Madness ' was a financial failure, and I should be churlish if I did not respond promptly to your request; for in the first place, it contains an elegant implication that the piece did not fail as a work of art; and in the second, my debt to you is considerable. Do you remember how, in 1920, on a gusty day of July you went to Ranelagh and witnessed an open-air performance of ' Square Pegs ' ? In those days I knew you only by sight, and when half the dialogue had literally gone down the wind, I conceived that you must have thought poorly of the writer's talent. Nevertheless, after eighteen months, you sent me a telegraphic invitation to reconstruct Gay's ' Polly ': a little later you enlisted my help in the ill-fated ' Insect Play ': and when another two years had passed you were presenting ' Midsummer Madness ' at your theatre. And what playwright will not think kindly of the first manager who gives him a hearing ? Moreover, your present suggestion is peculiarly seductive. I feel as though I were a bull in a Spanish arena who has been asked if he would enjoy an unimpeded *quart-d'heure* among the picadors. Of course he would. And my picadors are the newspaper men.

" It is too late now to disembowel them with any benefit to ' Midsummer Madness ' or to their souls. Were I to do so, they might count me less easy prey in the future, but they would certainly behave to the next man as they have always behaved to me. The old proverb is true—they ' must be endured.' And yet, if I am to answer your question, I shall have at least to prod them under the fifth rib. I shall have to

submit that they were mistaken: a mild 'tu quoque,' seeing that they as good as announced to the world that Gibbs and I were a pair of imbeciles.

For the prospects of the play were ruined by a press of surprising malignancy. When you produced the piece in the beginning of July—with the lean months ahead of it—we knew that only a genial press could keep it afloat until the holidays should be over. You will remember that our audiences, whether large or small, were invariably enthusiastic; and although their warmth was due in great part to the charm and skill of the players, I am confident that the play, if it had been as worthless as the critics announced, would have undermined the playing, and would not have reached its hundredth performance. The contemptuous tone of the press prevented the public from coming to the theatre. Two critics, it is true, found in the play what we thought to have put there; and it is true, also, that Sir Owen Seaman and Mr. J. C. Squire were critics who had high reputations for taste and literary ability; but their voices alone could not prevail against the chorus of rank and file.

"To what, then, ought I to attribute the ill-temper of the newspaper man? Here was an audacious experiment—a ballad-opera that had only four characters, a single scene and practically no change of costume. How should they docket it? Had it been modelled upon Gilbert they might have been comfortable. What did they do? They declared that it was a bad imitation of Congreve. Why Congreve? Because you had recently produced 'The Way of the World.' A year earlier they would have prattled of Mr. Gay. Now, is it not surprising that a gentleman who calls himself a dramatic critic should write as though a play were hastily scribbled during the run of its precursor? One of them, indeed, reflected so little that he accused me of oafishness for requiring Miss Tempest to speak certain lines; as though

a play by an unestablished writer is cast before it is written. A modest knowledge of the theatre might have led them to divine the truth—that 'Midsummer Madness' lay in a drawer for two years before you were able to produce it.

"Finally, the Lyric Theatre, by reason of its tradition, must confer honour upon any living author whose work it displays; and I fear that I am not unreasonably suspicious if I suggest that some of our critics were envious of my good fortune. Be that as it may, I wonder if they pictured me as a complacent follower of Congreve, Shakespeare and Gay? At least they leapt to their chance. They could not condemn a classic without loss of prestige. Bax and Gibbs might be butchered with impunity. And at the same time, my dear Playfair, they saw perhaps an opportunity of keeping you up to the mark (your own high mark) by showing that your work was not to be automatically praised. I suggest that conceivably our critics mistook transparency for emptiness, that, in Dryden's words, they were of those

> who count as weaker
> The finer, nay sometimes the wittier speaker,

and that they neither paused to perceive the design of the piece as a whole nor were willing to try its flavour in place of whatsoever it may have been for which they were prepared. Could I not have written in a smarter, more fashionable style? Could I not have been more topical? Easily; and they might then have been more gracious, though I doubt it. I, at least, should not have constructed the work which I had in mind, a work which I hoped might please my fellows like a print from Watteau.

"Yours sincerely,

"CLIFFORD BAX."

I must frankly confess that I shared, to a very great extent, Mr. Bax's disappointment at the result. Moreover, I

am very ready to shoulder my share of the responsibility for such shortcomings as contributed to its failure—and indeed, I am sure he is ready, too. But I think the main responsibility, as he points out, lies with the critics. As a rule, they have treated my theatre, and indeed everything with which I have been concerned, with extraordinary generosity; but here was a case in which generosity was particularly needed, and I often wonder why it was not forthcoming. It is true that they may be able to retort, "We asked you to produce a play by a new author, but it ought to have been, and could have been, a much better one." But no better one seemed to me forthcoming; and I take it very hardly that scarcely one of them gave me the smallest credit for making the attempt, whatever they may have thought of the result. They simply cannot have realised for a moment the extraordinary difficulties which Mr. Bax set himself to overcome. The average musical comedy or light opera would fail dismally were the cast to be reduced to less than forty or so; Mr. Bax set himself to write an opera for *four* performers! Now, to write a one-act piece for four performers is easy enough; but to keep alive the interest of an audience in four people throughout a whole evening is a Herculean task. Light opera depends so much on novelty for its effect; and how can one go on introducing novelty with so few characters? Again, how can one possibly invent a plot which will be light enough for the *genre*, and yet not vapour away into entire inanity? The task which Mr. Bax set himself was indeed Herculean; and anybody who takes the trouble to examine the book will see with what extraordinary skill, what ingenious combinations and permutations he attempted it. If you make me admit that he failed, I will still maintain that he came nearer to success than any other writer could have done. But I don't really feel that he did fail. I must hastily guard myself from pretending to agree with everything which he

says in his letter; but with one part of it I am in agreement: I back his statement that those people who disregarded the severe warnings of the critics and came themselves to see 'Midsummer Madness' really did express delight and approval: its little band of adherents remained faithful, and even grew in numbers during an extremely bad theatrical season. But I am afraid I knew from our first night that its fate from the financial point of view was sealed.

It was our first intention that Mr. Frederic Austin should write the music; but his undertakings were so many that he had not the time for it, and so Mr. Armstrong Gibbs stepped into his place. Mr. Gibbs's reputation stands among the highest of our younger composers, and he seemed to me admirably suited for this task, combining as he does a quite fearless acceptance of modernism where it suits his purpose with an equally fearless refusal to allow himself to be carried away by it for fashion's sake. He had Mr. Bax's cast of mind, and it seemed to me he had Mr. Bax's technical ability; and I don't think I could have made a better choice, as everybody who heard the music will, I feel sure, acknowledge.

I saw at once that as there were only four people in the cast their choice must be a matter for very urgent thought; and I also saw quite clearly that at any cost two of them must be, if remotely possible, Miss Marie Tempest and Mr. Frederick Ranalow. I was very doubtful of being able to secure the services of the first—it was a long time since she had appeared in any form of opera, and I knew that she was far too great an artist to undertake anything which she could not carry out—but to my great joy I found Miss Tempest anxious to help; and from the beginning to the end her enthusiasm never faltered. She loved the part, she loved the the play; and I discovered to my great surprise that, merely from reading about it at the ends of the earth, she had taken a particular fancy to the Lyric, Hammersmith.

MRS. NOLAN (MRS. PASCAL): DESIGN BY GFORGE SHERINGHAM FOR "MIDSUMMER MADNESS"

PAT NOLAN (PANTALOON): DESIGN BY GEORGE SHERINGHAM FOR "MIDSUMMER MADNESS"

This theatre is, of course, Frederick Ranalow's tonic home, so that he was happy also to return to it.

Whenever you want a hero or a heroine for comic opera you must be prepared to hack your way through a forest of difficulties. In this case I found in Mr. Eisdell and Miss Marjorie Dixon a pair with delightful singing voices, but with practically no acting experience, and it is not the faintest discredit to them to say that the strain upon them both was too great. But alas, until we have a permanent home for that kind of light opera which England can supply, and ought to be proud to supply, this will always be the case.

At least the undertaking of this little work gave me a great opportunity for exercising the ingenuity of Mr. George Sheringham; for all the action takes place in one scene, and there was very little possibility of variation in costume, and it was an opportunity of which he took full advantage with, I think I may say, complete success.

Mr. Armstrong Gibbs, with the help of Mr. Reynolds, secured a little chamber orchestra which played his music quite charmingly. But I have sometimes thought, since, that I made a mistake in not suggesting that the whole of it should be played realistically, as it were—that is, by a fifth character playing a piano actually on the stage. The suggestion certainly should have occurred to me when I heard Mr. Armstrong Gibbs himself play the music through at a rehearsal which I held in a real garden one summer evening, in order to capture, if I could, some additional effects. It would certainly not only have added to the illusion of the play, but it might have made just the difference to expenses which would have crossed the border from failure to success.

In any case, I have no regrets at all for having produced "Midsummer Madness," and I hope (though I am afraid not with any great faith) that it will not be my last experiment in this direction. But I fear that without the support

of millionaires (who, as the years go by, become fewer and fewer, or if not, and Socialist statisticians assert not, at any rate shyer and yet more shy), opera in this country has no future at all, unless its humbler beginnings are welcomed and encouraged. For I feel convinced that the future of English light opera can only lie in the direction of Mr. Bax's and Mr. Gibbs's experiment.

Bearing all these difficulties in mind, in what direction should the purveyors of light opera wend their difficult way ? In some form or other, a musical play in England is always certain of a welcome; but in what form is it to appear in the future ? Obviously it is easier to take the line of least resistance, and continue with an endless succession of so-called musical comedies—pieces which seldom contain anything that can reasonably be considered music, and never anything that can be legitimately claimed by the Muse of Comedy. But I am glad to feel that there are a great many people, whose number is increasing, who demand in their evening's entertainment a little of both ingredients; and it is in catering for them that any vital development is likely to arise. Obviously we must aim at economy of effect and simplicity of treatment—songs and music that may be rendered by sweet singers, but not too many of them—music that may be played perfectly without the necessity of many instruments. This is not only for reasons of economy—a reason which, I am afraid, I have insisted on so often as perhaps to bore the reader—but is also because extravagance, never a virtue in itself, has been completely done to death by the other school. I have nothing whatever to say against intelligent extravagance, but only that expenditure and garishness can never cover stupidity—indeed, they only reveal it. A producer who might successfully hide his small abilities in a small production only advertises the poverty of his invention by attempting to use a large brush and bright colours;

and so bad are the results achieved by all who do make this attempt—so incredibly bad—that I feel the next generation will have to learn the lesson of production right from the beginning; that if light opera is ever to have new life it can only begin on the very smallest possible scale; and that not till we can put on a really perfect cabaret show should we be allowed to attempt a panoramic display. Size is at present simply an excuse for laziness and ineptitude. Authors who have not Mr. Bax's ability, and could not possibly have faced the difficulties he faced, glibly attempt to manage twenty or thirty characters; and it will not be until they accept the discipline which Mr. Bax put upon himself that they will have their eyes opened even to the existence of the technique of their craft. And it is not till they have the technique of such small productions at their fingers' ends that they will ever really do anything good on a larger canvas.

Here, indeed, I do think that the eighteenth-century ballad-operas prove of great utility as models—not to be slavishly followed, of course; rather as a promise that success is not impossible; though even as models in the more elementary sense, they are far more valuable than the libretti of W. S. Gilbert, on which most contemporary stuff seems to be based—Gilbert, whose virtues seemingly cannot be imitated, but whose faults are reproduced with sycophantic fidelity by the thousand writers who fondly imagine that they found their efforts upon his example. Moreover, if he were alive, I am perfectly certain that he would find himself obliged to pursue very different methods nowadays. One has to remember that he had at his command everything he could want in the way of voices and personalities. There was nothing to tempt them away from him: it never came into question whether Grossmith and Barrington and Jessie Bond would be able to resist the call of wealth offered them from Winter Gardens, Los Angeles, and Syndicate Halls.

Human nature being as it is, and the income-tax as it was not, I fear they probably would not! But, as I say, it never came into question; and Gilbert could afford to set tasks which could only be carried out by the highest ability of his generation.

Moreover, there is even another reason why the eighteenth century gives better models. Oddly enough, we are really nearer to the eighteenth century than to the nineteenth; for in the swinging pendulum of action and reaction we may be, as it were, vertically nearer to the nineteenth, but laterally the swing has brought us nearer to a position almost that of a century before. And good as Gilbert was, I cannot but feel that the best ballad-operas of the eighteenth century are in certain respects better than anything he did or could do.

CHAPTER TWELVE

"The Duenna"—and After

Study and Stage—Sheringham's Scenery—Changes While You do Not Wait—Fandangos "Made in England"—Charles, his Friend—The Monastic System—"The Rivals"—Is Mrs. Malaprop a Bore?—Dogberry in the Orchard—Vale!

XII

IT has been a favourite dictum of theatrical historians, and its success at the time of its first performance is in favour of their judgment, that "The Duenna" is the best comic opera in the English language, "The Beggar's Opera" excepted. I do not think that at any time I have agreed with their opinion even as regards the eighteenth century, and I certainly do not think that it is a better opera than "The Mikado" or "The Yeoman of the Guard."

At the same time, it was obviously marked for revival, and seemed likely to have a considerable success with our audience, and this view turned out to be conspicuously right.

Naturally when I was producing it I read a good deal of literature on the subject of Sheridan. Amongst other books was Mr. Walter Sichel's admirable "Life." I struck in it a most excellent example of what I have had to say in my chapter on "The Beggar's Opera" against literary critics. They read plays and judge them solely as books: they have not the necessary visual and auditory imagination to see and hear a play in an imaginary theatre when reading it, and fall into the most extraordinary errors of judgment as the result. "It is difficult now to realize the stir that it ('The Duenna') made," says Mr. Sichel, "a sensation not merely of the moment, but retained in full vigour for fifty years. . . . Strokes like these give salt to a piece which in the main has lost its savour. Apart from its lyrics, indeed, 'The Duenna' is dead as Queen Charlotte. It remains in the long list of obsolete innovations, and resembles some Early Victorian cabinet, well inlaid and once admired, but now hopelessly out of date." Perhaps this curious lack of judgment in

theatrical matters on the part of literary critics springs from an excess, rather than a lack, of respect for the managers; perhaps Mr. Sichel thought that because "The Duenna" had not been recently revived it could not be, and modestly refrained from using his own judgment in the matter. But I suspect, with all deference (for in matters of history and pure literature Mr. Sichel is quite outside the reach of any criticism of mine)—I suspect that his judgment sprang from a misconception of the nature of the theatre. This suspicion is backed up by a concrete example. Mr. Sichel quotes as one of the most famous and wittiest lines—as indeed he justly might—the description of the six-weeks' Christian "who stands like a dead wall between the Church and Synagogue, or like the blank leaves between the Old and New Testament." To anybody reading the play purely as a book this line is bound to stand out; but I can record it as a fact that it has never raised even the ghost of a laugh in our production! There is a certain slowness of apprehension which is inseparable from a theatre audience: not that they are stupid people—far from it; but it is one thing to have all one's wits concentrated to a single point when reading a book in one's study, and another thing to be able to follow out with equal agility of abstract thought when perpetual diversions are attacking the brain through the eye and ear. Reading a play in the study, the dialogue is the whole thing, and can claim the whole attention; when produced on the stage it is but a third of the whole, where action (in which I include decoration) and music claim equal shares with it. And this line is a typical example of one just a shade too subtle to get over the footlights. Nor is this obtuseness peculiar to our age, for that Sheridan himself was doubtful of its effect on the stage is conclusively proved by the fact that in the manuscript it was first deleted and only reinserted later. Sheridan would hardly have done that if he

DESIGN BY GEORGE SHERINGHAM FOR "THE DUENNA"

regarded it, from the stage point of view, as one of the best lines in the piece.

But whatever the reason may be, since the eighteenth century the play has hardly been revived at all. Some admirable performances of it were given at the Maddermarket Theatre in Norwich a year or two ago; and the Birmingham Repertory Company have done it at Birmingham. But otherwise it was absolutely untouched. In the eighteenth century, as I have said, its success was phenomenal: its run beat even that of "The Beggar's Opera." It was produced in the autumn of 1775 at Covent Garden—not, as has been stated in the Press, at Drury Lane. Indeed, Drury Lane was hard put to it to find a counter-attraction, and ended by setting up as a rival play by Sheridan's own mother, "The Discovery," Mr. Aldous Huxley's version of which I recently produced for the Three Hundred Club. But nothing could draw the public from "The Duenna." It had an excellent cast, with Leoni, Quick as Isaac, and Mrs. Green for the Duenna; it had all the advantages which "The Rivals" in its first edition had not had, and it succeeded beyond all possible expectation. Curiously enough, Sheridan never authorized the publication of the text; indeed, he only fully authorized the publication of "The Critic," "Pizarro" and a political pamphlet. But garbled versions and travesties abounded, the first being printed in Dublin in 1785; and editions of parodies, according to Mr. Sichel, seem even to have found their way into bibliographies of the play itself.

After that, as I have said, the nineteenth century quietly forgot it, adopting the comfortable doctrine that being the product of an earlier generation it must, *ipso facto*, now be dead.

Mr. Sichel is quite right, however, when he gives as one of the causes of the piece's original success that the music fits it like a glove. It certainly does, or did. But it is not any-

thing like so outstanding a piece of work as the libretto. We soon found, when we came to examine it, that it had aged a great deal more than the book. Linley's work in general has been described as " Handel and water "; and while it goes without saying that Linley was a very talented person,* there is a certain amount of truth in the accusation. It is very delightful in its absolute purity of harmony, which was then fashionable; but it has not got what the dialogue has—staying power. There was no tune in it which could find its way into the repertory of the kitchen-maid and errand boy, in the way that the old folk-tunes of " The Beggar's Opera " did; no kitchen-maid was likely to teach me airs from " The Duenna " ! After a month or two, indeed, of our run, we all of us soon found the very inoffensiveness of the music growing gradually tiresome, and longed for something violently arresting and vulgar. In consequence, when we were planning our production, it was obvious that the music would need a very great deal of overhauling, and indeed re-writing; and for the purpose we called in Mr. Reynolds. Mr. Reynolds was already a very distinguished pianist, and he conducted for us in " The Insect Play." He is such a modest man that it was with a great deal of difficulty that I persuaded him of his competence for the task: when he sat down to it, however, he became enthusiastic, and by the time he had finished there was really a good deal more

* Mr. Sichel quotes an amusing story about the Linley family, who were all very talented persons. Elizabeth's brother, Tom, was found playing his violin in the nursery. " Oho ! " asked the visitor, " Is the little man going to distinguish himself like the rest ? " " We are all geniuses here, Sir," answered Tom. This was not merely precocity : Mozart afterwards met Tom at Florence, and expressed himself very forcibly about the young man's brilliant future. But alas ! at twenty-two he was drowned in a boating accident ; and though a few compositions which remain bear ample witness to the soundness of Mozart's prophecy, they are not enough in themselves to give Tom Linley the place in music which he would have won had he lived.

Reynolds than Linley in the composition. About half the airs were his alone, and all the others he had considerably revised. Consequently it was with considerable ill-temper that I found a criticism in one of the papers which sneered at Mr. Reynolds, and at "this matter of composing music after somebody else who has composed it." This critic gave it to be understood that Reynolds simply altered a note here and there, and always for the worse, and then was trying to take the credit for the whole. The critic, who thereby tried to give the impression that he was familiar with Linley's music, simply gave himself away and betrayed his entire ignorance of the original setting, as well as his own ill-nature. But I am glad to say that he afterwards made a thoroughly well-deserved apology to Mr. Reynolds; for a modester man, one less given to self-advertisement and taking the credit for other men's work, it would be hard to find.

The scenery and dresses, of course, were designed by Mr. Sheringham; and I think they are the most successful bit of work for the stage he has yet done. Mechanically they are extraordinarily simple; and yet he contrives to give, by the manipulation of a few drops, a quite astonishing air of variety. Of furniture, except for a couple of chairs, we had none whatever; and consequently, the scene could be completely changed in between four and five seconds! Except between the acts, we never lowered the curtain at all, only turned out the lights; and in the short period when the sudden darkness blinds the eyes, before the pupils have time to pick up the rays of those exit lights (which to the despair of the producer, the Lord Chamberlain insists shall always be kept fully burning), the drops went up and down, libraries became monastery gardens, streets became churches, or what not. Mr. Sheringham seldom exhibited better an admirable sense of colour, and a very great deal of credit is, I feel, due to him.

But everybody worked with an admirable enthusiasm. Mr. Rupert Doone's Spanish dancers, who were one and all English, were specially indefatigable. For weeks before the production they rehearsed their dances day and night almost; one could hardly find a corner of the theatre where a *fandango* was not in progress; and the result completely justified the pains they had taken. Some critics complained that their dancing occupied too much of the audience's attention; but there I cannot agree. I feel myself that it was perfectly in keeping with the picture, and was so good in itself as to be a continual delight.

The part of Don Carlos gave me a considerable amount of trouble during the rehearsals.

In the original MSS. he was intended to be a comic Jewish friend of Isaac—a sort of musical version of Tubal.

But the part was given to Leoni, a favourite tenor singer and a counterpart of the "Matinee idol" of to-day—or ought I to say of yesterday? (The simile holds good though, of course, in those days there were no matinees.)

Leoni, however, was himself a Jew, so strict a Jew that on his account performances of the play were never given on Fridays. But to play a Jew, and a comic Jew at that, was not within his conception of his dignity. Sheridan must have said, "Oh, have it your own way," as many authors have had to say to stage favourites before and since. So the comic Jew became a gracious but entirely characterless Don Carlos, the ancestor of a host of dramatis personæ known in theatrical parlance as "Charles, his friend."

No reason appears in the text for Isaac having such a friend, ready to sing sentimental ballads on the smallest provocation, and as I was not going to waste the humours of Guy le Feuvre I had to invent one. I conceived the notion, therefore, that Carlos was a needy aristocrat, a kind of dependent Sir Eglamour, hired perhaps to introduce Isaac

into the manners and customs of the aristocracy and fulfilling his bargain with despondency. I hope Sheridan forgives me for helping him out of a difficulty which I am sure he created against his better judgment. If he saw Le Feuvre's performance I am sure he has.

He became, I think, first favourite with the audience, and created a " tradition " for the part which will remain.

Miss Elsie French as the Duenna had again a part which suited her admirably, and a truly terrific creature she made. Her dance with Isaac at the end of the courting scene in the library never failed to be encored again and again, as it fully deserved to be, for an extremely witty piece of miming it was.

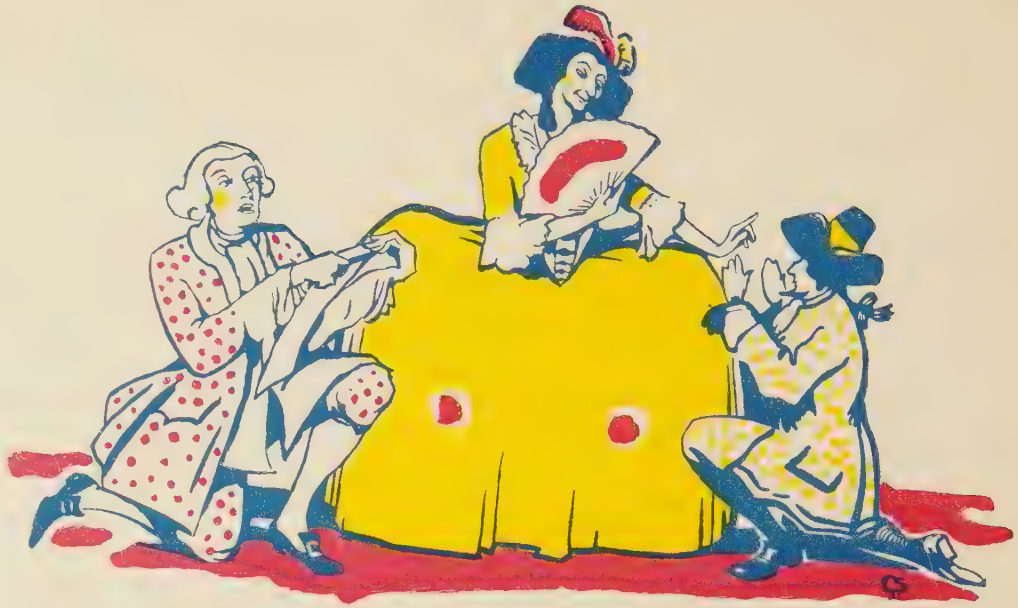
There was only one alteration which I made in the actual text, beyond the addition of two songs, one of which was by Sheridan, and one from a contemporary opera. This alteration was in deference to public taste—I deleted a scene which was a rather offensive attack on Roman Catholicism and the monastic system: not particularly amusing in itself, but simply put in because such attacks at the time were fashionable. Nowadays they are not, and rightly not. But even with this scene omitted I had certain trouble on that score. As we first produced it, the magnificent grotesque scene between Isaac, Antonio and the Bacchanalian monk, which culminates in the rousing song, " This Bottle's the Sun our Table " (sung with such gorgeous hilarity by Mr. Scott Russell), was followed immediately by the church interior, with the wedding conducted by Mr. Scott Russell; and the juxtaposition came to many of the audience with something of a shock. Accordingly I slightly altered the dialogue, so as to make the Bacchanalian monk not the officiating priest, but simply a lay brother, and put back a small bit of dialogue between the song and the church scene to let the audience down a bit gently, as it were. And after that I had no more complaints.

For our two heroines, Donna Louisa and Donna Clara, we had Elsa Macfarlane (afterwards succeeded by Marjorie Dixon) and Isobel Maclaren. Miss Macfarlane had hitherto appeared only in the most modern of musical comedies. Elsa Lanchester and Angela Baddeley made a charming pair of pages, though the parts of Lewis and Sancho really did not give scope for the abilities of either of them. In the play, too, Pitt-Chatham's daughter, Joan, made her debut as Donna Clara's maid.

Mr. Reynolds himself conducted the orchestra, which consisted of a couple of violins, a viola, a 'cello, double-bass, two flutes, and a bassoon, and which contained that admirable 'cellist, Miss Phyllis Hasluck, and was led by Mr. Philip Levine.

The run of " The Duenna " was certainly not long, not nearly as long as its reception justified me in thinking it might be, but it gave pleasure to a great many people and made money. I decided to follow it with " The Rivals," which had been too long absent from the London stage. It is a play comparatively easy to do, and helped me to make quickly a step forward in an ambition which I cherish, to give this generation an opportunity of seeing all the leading classics of the eighteenth century upon the stage within the space of their theatre-going days.

The history of " The Rivals " is a very curious one: it immediately preceded " The Duenna," and Sheridan was already a marked man when it appeared. The scandal-mongers in the newspapers had profited to such an extent by the complicated affair of his platonic elopement with Miss Linley, his two bloody duels with Matthews, and his subsequent marriage against his father's consent and with the somewhat tardy consent of his father-in-law, that his name was already a familiar one to readers of the news-sheets. And when he had settled down in London with his lovely



DESIGN BY GEORGE SHERINGHAM FOR "THE DUENNA"

and accomplished wife, he had earned general approbation by his absolute refusal to let her sing for money (and it must be remembered that at eighteen she was one of the most famous singers of her time)—a refusal which modern notions of feminism would consider at least a doubtful virtue, but which then seemed a necessity for a man of honour. Instead, however, he had taxed his already circumscribed resources by giving frequent invitation concerts, which drew everyone who was lucky enough to be admitted. As for writing, he had done nothing before "The Rivals" of any very great merit; and the first edition of "The Rivals," though an enormous advance on anything he had yet done, was a great deal too long-winded. It was produced anonymously, but everyone knew its authorship: consequently a brilliant audience was present, but it was by no means altogether friendly. A *claque* of hissers had to be thrown out of the gallery, and even the boxes witnessed a challenge to a duel! Outside the critics raged and foamed: they said of "The Rivals" what is quite invariably said of any dramatic innovation—that it was not a play at all. In short, it was a failure. Mrs. Sheridan, who was (I suspect) anxious for an excuse to begin singing again, hardly concealed her delight. "My dear Dick," she wrote, "I am delighted. I always knew that it was impossible you could make anything by writing plays, so now there is nothing for it but my beginning to sing publicly again, and we shall have as much money as we like." But Sheridan was obdurate. He re-wrote "The Rivals," cutting it and improving it almost out of recognition. It was produced again on 28th January, and ran for a fortnight, which then meant a very signal success.

To describe its subsequent stage history would be a task that would require a volume in itself.

Next to the "School for Scandal" and "She Stoops to Conquer," it has been the most persistently revived of all

the plays since Shakespeare, and indeed it is a commonplace of the text-books to describe these three plays as the only successful contributions to the literature of the theatre since his day. It is a shallow judgment which I hope our efforts at Hammersmith have done just a little to upset—I don't think at any rate that future writers will be ready to place "The Way of the World" below "The Rivals." If they do our audience will certainly not be found in agreement with them.

I attempted to make no "daring innovations" in the methods of my production. I did tamper with the traditional presentation of "Mrs. Malaprop," however, and though I had some supporters, on the whole frankly the verdict, perhaps rightly, was against me. It arose this way. The last time "The Rivals" was produced in London I refrained from paying it a visit, and the excuse I made to myself was that the character of Mrs. Malaprop bored me.

She is amusing for five minutes, but after that we know exactly what she is going to do and how she is going to do it. To be moved to laughter we must meet with the unexpected.

I thought many people would share my views, and it occurred to me to make Mrs. Malaprop a "natural" character—a personage that might excite amusement but not bewilderment in the set in which she moved.

In carrying out the experiment I required Miss Edith Evans to help me, but the idea did not appeal to her.

Miss Green loyally essayed the task . . . and after the first few performances, I think, with complete success. She was not, however, successful on the fatal first night, and did not please the critics. Her natural sweetness and dignity and her almost insuperable gracefulness were too much for her.

"The Rivals" was by no means a failure, but it cannot be fairly ranked among our successes, though I think through-

out it was better acted than any play we have done, and Norman Wilkinson's scenery and dresses were exquisite. But perhaps it proved its weakness as a play—it is certainly a comedy of promise rather than achievement—the work of an extremely gifted amateur.

It is fair to say that Oxford did not think so. I took it there for a week at the end of the run, and broke all records at the theatre there, in spite of the counter-attractions of the River in Eights Week.

And now I come to the end of my task with a brief note of the play which is now running at the Lyric as I write, Tchehov's "The Cherry Orchard."

I had the honour of acting in this play when it was given by the Stage Society about fourteen years ago.

On that occasion the audience were so frankly bored by it that nearly half of them left the theatre before the final curtain.

Last night, at Hammersmith, one of the hottest nights of a very hot summer, the theatre was packed from floor to ceiling, and it gives me unbounded pleasure to be able to end this little book on a note of optimism and trust in the ultimate good taste of English audiences.

I am not crying up my own goods.

Mr. Fagan, the director of the Oxford Players, has done the production for me, and nearly all his company are young people who are receiving their training there.

I saw the performance at Oxford a few months ago, and at once made up my mind that Hammersmith should have the opportunity of sharing my appreciation, which I was certain they would do.

But after the first night it seemed that their opportunity would be very short-lived.

It pains me to print a criticism, if criticism it can be called, which appeared under the initials "B. M. H." in the *Daily*

Express on the morning after the first performance, but it is salutary to show the difficulties under which pioneers like Fagan sometimes have to work. Well, here it is :

" Lenin achieved something after all. He wiped out of existence all the characters in Tchehov's plays. Not for me to suggest that bad drama inspired the Russian Revolution. I am content with the happy fact that, thanks to the Soviet, a great deal of absurd material must perish.

" Last night we had a revival of ' The Cherry Orchard.' It was my third experience of this silly, tiresome, boring comedy. To make matters worse, the Calderon translation, full of pathetic euphemisms, was used. That of Constance Garnett is far better, though I know of no reason why this fatuous drivel should be translated at all.

" There is no plot. The cherry orchard is for sale, and certain dull people are upset because it must be sold, and in the last act it is sold. I decline to smile or shed the thinnest of tears over such a pointless story. One can only assume that it is produced over here because there are always people ready to be bemused by a name ending on ' ov ' or ' ovsky.'

" Miss Mary Grey, Miss Gwendolen Evans, Mr. Alan Napier, Mr. Fred O'Donovan, Mr. O. B. Clarence, and Mr. John Gielgud wasted their talents on this material, which has no conceivable relation with either drama or literature."

At any rate, it will serve as an example of a dramatic critic determined at all costs " to write himself down an ass."

Curiously enough, with one or two humble exceptions, the critics of the daily papers seemed to agree with his verdict.

The more serious critics took another view.

Agate of the *Sunday Times*, said :

" But there, it's no use talking, ' The Cherry Orchard ' is an imperishable masterpiece, which will remain as long

as men have eyes to see, ears to hear, and the will to comprehend beauty. I am always being asked which is the best play in London. This is. For the High-brow ? Yes, and for the butcher, baker, and candlestick-maker as well. I suggest that 'The Cherry Orchard' is one of the great plays of the world."

Mr. Farjeon, in the *Sunday Pictorial*, wrote:

"Certainly I consider that 'The Cherry Orchard,' far from being drivel, is one of the dramatic masterpieces of all time."

And Lady Cunard, one of our constant supporters, took up the challenge of the *Daily Express*, and wrote as follows:

"Sir,—Twelve years ago Mr. George Moore told me that 'The Cherry Orchard' was the most perfect work of art which the modern theatre had produced.

"The other night, at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, I realized that the haunting beauty and life-sense of this masterpiece can only be fully appreciated by those who have seen it on the stage.

"I am moved to write out of pity for your numerous readers who, having read the divergent view of your dramatic critic, may be deprived of the greatest artistic enjoyment which the theatre can afford.—MAUD CUNARD."

To have given the opportunity to my friends to see a great play like this, which would not, I think, have been possible but for the educational work which preceded it, has been my privilege, and it has been a privilege worth fighting for, and it is a privilege which I pray and believe is not yet exhausted—anyhow, it's been great fun!

* * * * * * *

I feel that perhaps the note of optimism which I have struck in this little book may sound a little vibrantly in the

ears of many people. I can only say that my restricted experience of the world leaves me with grounds for optimism and perhaps I may be allowed to relate yet one more little story for the literal truth of which I can vouch.

A very young scion of a very old but very impoverished family was up for " Lords " and took it into his head on Sunday evening to try a solitary walk along the Embankment complete with cornflower button-hole, top hat and Eton jacket. His meditations were interrupted by an " out-of-work " with a somewhat overbearing personality, who demanded alms. Rather from a desire of cutting short an embarrassing interview, than from any general philanthropy, he gave him his first handy coin, which happened to be half a crown, and walked rather more rapidly homewards. A moment or two afterwards he felt a tap on the shoulder, and the recipient of his bounty was again beside him, and addressed him in these words: " 'Ere, you don't want to give me this, 'aven't you got a sixpence ? " He had, the exchange was effected and they parted the best of friends.

A fool doubtless, but we need not despair of England so long as she is capable of breeding fools like this.

Greetings and farewell !

River House
Upper Mall
Hammersmith

Sunday, 7th June 1925

EPILOGUE

SOMETIMES I feel that it was I who founded the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith; that mine is the policy which has directed it thus far; mine the banana barrows which adorn its entrance. It may be that I am wrong about this, for if it is my theatre, what the devil should Mr. Nigel Playfair be doing in the gallery ? Possibly I have engaged him at a small salary to pick up the banana-skins. More likely, though, it is his theatre after all—and he has engaged me, at no salary at all, to write an epilogue to his book. If so, here it is.

I think that, when I die, I shall have graved on my tombstone—possibly among other remarks—these magic words: "He was a good listener." My real claim to immortality, the reason why I regard the Lyric as my own child, lies in this: that when Mr. Playfair first began—really began—to talk about the theatre he was going to open, it was I who gave him the cues. The future Lessee and Manager talked: the unknown dramatist and his wife listened. No great work was ever undertaken without some such co-operation as this, but as a rule Posterity does little to honour the more humble member of the firm. Whenever I am in Ludgate Circus I look vainly for the statue of Lady Wren; whenever I am in the foyer (if I may call it that) of the Lyric, Hammersmith, I feel that what it really wants (to make it a foyer) is a bust of myself. But for me. . . .

Well, Nigel talked, and we listened. Every Sunday he came to us. How eagerly we followed his progress from week to week ! With what disappointment we heard that he had just failed to secure an option on a disused shop in the Mile End Road; with what joy, on the following Sunday, that

he was now negotiating for a lease of Buckingham Palace. As I was to be his first author it was necessary that I should be kept in touch with his prospects. Say what he will about his art, a dramatist, in as far as he is a craftsman too, must consider his stage and his public. A play for the National Opera House, Covent Garden, such as we were discussing earnestly one Sunday, would naturally be different in certain technical details from a play for an open-air theatre at Wapping Old Stairs . . . and on the next Sunday I was the first to admit this.

Then came the day when Nigel made his great discovery at Hammersmith. Embittered locals assert that Hammersmith existed before, and for other reasons; as indeed is manifest once a year, when Cambridge shoots its bridge in 8 minutes 5 seconds, and Oxford, in its vicinity, quickens to 39. But whereas all that a thousand University oarsmen have discovered is that Hammersmith is about eight minutes by water from Putney, Mr. Nigel Playfair made the much more important contribution to knowledge that, practically speaking, Hammersmith is only round the corner from Shaftesbury Avenue. It seemed a long way round to us on that first morning when we went there, but Nigel assured us that one only had this feeling on a Sunday, and that actually, when the trains were running, it was more conveniently situated than Wyndham's or the Haymarket. We agreed that, for residents in Hammersmith, this might be the case . . . and so, at last, arrived.

I forget just what happened when he showed us the theatre for the first time. As far as I remember, he said proudly: " This is it ! " . . . and, after an awkward silence, I said, " Oh, yes," and my wife said, " Are you sure ? " It turned out that he was positive. We went inside. " There you are ! " he said cheerfully, and for a little while we stood looking down at the stalls from the dress circle. No doubt

Nigel was already counting the crowned heads beneath him, but to me the theatre felt terribly empty. It seemed that never would there be more than three people in the dress circle, and none in the stalls. To give it a more prosperous air, we went down into the stalls and stood looking up at the empty dress circle, thus increasing the size of the house by about seven and sixpence. Finally, realizing that no more could be done in front, we went behind; and the Lessee and Manager showed us proudly—but in turn, of course—the principal dressing-rooms.

So it was that I took the Lyric, Ham—I mean that thus, as far as I can remember now, the new management at Hammersmith came into being. You may say that I don't seem to have had much to do with it. Perhaps not; and yet in some curious way I still seem to myself to have had a great deal to do with it. Evidently, too, the Lessee and Manager feels that justice has not yet been done to me, for why else should he deem his book incomplete without some words from my vindicating pen?

Well, I have said the words and need say no more. It may be left to posterity and the Mayor of Hammersmith to do the rest. Of the many achievements of the Lyric Theatre since those days this book will have told you. There is only one rule for successful theatrical management, and I give it away here. Follow your own humour. In an undergraduate paper many years ago there appeared these words: " Your college may not be the best in Cambridge, but it certainly isn't if you don't think it is "—a simple and universal truth. The public may not like a play, but it certainly won't if the manager doesn't like it. If he but hold a pipe through which a dozen windy acquaintances, partners, rivals, backers and other experts make music as they pass, nobody will care to listen; but if he blow happily and enthusiastically for himself, the crowd will soon be round him. Mr. Playfair is often

accused of knowing, in some occult way, the tunes which the public really likes. He has much more valuable knowledge than this: he knows the tunes which he himself really likes—and is not afraid of them. His *flair*, of which people talk, is the *flair* which a few women have, of exploiting, not their toilets, but their personalities by means of their toilets; a *flair*, however, beyond most women, whose horizon is bounded by the minatory words " stock size." Mr. Playfair (metaphorically speaking) has never bothered to be stock size. Whether he is shingling five years before everybody else, or five years after everybody else, does not worry him; the point is that his carte-de-visite has now reached that stage in its development when shingling is the most effective style. The Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, neither leads the fashion nor follows it; is neither high-brow nor low-brow. It is simply a theatre which thinks for itself. I only intrude myself here because it was once my privilege to listen to it thinking.

A. A. Milne

APPENDIX

(Except where otherwise stated, these plays were performed at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith)

MAKE BELIEVE

A CHILDREN'S REVIEW AND PANTOMIME

December 24th, 1918

INTRODUCTION

By THE PRODUCER

Scissors, Paste	Daughters of the Muse of the Drama	ANGELA BADDELEY, HERMIONE BADDELEY
The Queen of Melody		CARMEN JUDAH
Some of the Audience		MARJORY HOLMAN, MARY ROSE, AUDREY BETTS, etc. ROY LENNOL, FRANK WORTH, BEN WORDY, etc.

THE PLAY

By A. A. MILNE

Act 1—The Princess and the Woodcutter

The Woodcutter	JOHN BARCLAY
The Princess	MARJORY HOLMAN
The King	KINSEY PEILE
The Queen	ROSA LYND
The Blue Prince	STANLEY DREWITT
The Red Prince	HERBERT MARSHALL
The Yellow Prince	IVAN BERLYN

Courtiers, etc.

Act 2—Oliver's Island

Scene 1—The Heal Nursery

Oliver	ROY LENNOL
Jill	MARJORY HOLMAN
Miss Pinniger	JEAN CADELL
The Rev. Lemuel Smilax	STANLEY DREWITT
The Doctor	KINSEY PEILE
Aunt Jane	ROSA LYND

Furniture and Decorations by HEAL & SONS, Tottenham Court Road

Scene 2—The Island

Oliver	ROY LENNOL
Jill	MARJORY HOLMAN
The Pirate Chief	JOHN BARCLAY
First Pirate	HERBERT MARSHALL
Second Pirate	STEPHEN THOMAS
Third Pirate	IVAN BERLYN
Steward	FRANK WORTH
Dusky Maiden	BETTY CHESTER
Miss Pinniger	JEAN CADELL
Fluffkins	KINSEY PEILE
Jane	ROSA LYND
The Missionary	STANLEY DREWITT
The Cassiowary	HANNAH HART
The Cannibal	H. GORDON

Pirates, Dusky Maidens, Fireflies, etc.

Act 3—Father Christmas and the Hubbard Family

Scene 1—The House of the Hubbards

Mr. Hubbard	KINSEY PEILE
Mrs. Hubbard	ROSA LYND

Scene 2—Outside the House of the Hubbards

Peter Ableways	JOHN BARCLAY
Jonas Humphrey	FORD HAMILTON
Jennifer Ling	CARMEN JUDAH
Martha Powitt	MAUD MILLER
Mr. Hubbard	KINSEY PEILE
Liz	BETTY CHESTER
Bill (a burglar)	HERBERT MARSHALL
A Policeman	STANLEY DREWITT

MAKE BELIEVE—*continued*

Scene 3—The House of the Hubbards

Mr. Hubbard	KINSEY PEILE
Mrs. Hubbard	ROSA LYND

Scene 4—The Hall of Father Christmas

Father Christmas	JOHN BARCLAY
Mr. Hubbard	KINSEY PEILE
Mrs. Hubbard	ROSA LYND
First Usher	H. GORDON
Second Usher	L. BARBER
Baron Bluebeard	HERBERT MARSHALL
Mr. Robinson Crusoe	ROY LENNOL
Goldilocks	JOAN WOOLLER
Red Riding Hood	MARJORY HOLMAN
Punchinello	HANNAH HART
A Cracker	OLIVE BLOSSOM BANGS

Toys, etc.

Scenery painted by MR. MAPLESON. Wigs by CLARKSON. Dresses designed and executed by MISS HILL CLARKE.

Produced by NIGEL PLAYFAIR

THE YOUNGER GENERATION

By STANLEY HOUGHTON

By permission of MAX ALLEN and EDWIN T. HEYS

January 29th, 1919

Cast in order of their appearance:

James Henry Kennion (the father)	STANLEY DREWITT
Mrs. Kennion (the mother)	ADA KING
Maggie (the maid)	BETTY CHESTER
Grace Kennion (the daughter)	ANNE DESMOND
Reggie Kennion (a son)	LESLIE BANKS
Tom Kennion (the uncle)	NIGEL PLAYFAIR
Mr. Leadbetter, Mr. Fowle (of the Liberal Association)	MURRI MONCRIEFF, ERNEST G. COVE
Arthur Kennion (a son)	HERBERT MARSHALL
Mrs. Hannah Kennion (the grandmother)	META PELHAM
Clifford Rawson	HUGH PEARSON GEE

Produced by STANLEY DREWITT

LA SERVA PADRONA

(The Maid Turned Mistress)

By PERGOLESI (1710-1736)

Originally produced in Italy in 1733

January 29th, 1919

Uberto (a Neapolitan gentleman)	JOHN BARCLAY
Vespone (his servant)	TOM REYNOLDS
Serpina(his maid)	GRACE CRAWFORD

Scene—A Room in Uberto's House

Scenery designed by MR. C. LOVAT FRASER

Produced by NIGEL PLAYFAIR

APPENDIX

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

By JOHN DRINKWATER

February 19th, 1919

The Play Produced by the Author

Cast:

First Chronicler		MARGARET CHATWIN
Second Chronicler		DOROTHY MASSINGHAM
Mr. Cuffney, Mr. Stone	Neighbours of Lincoln at Springfield	J. ADRIAN BYRNE, JOSEPH A. DODD
Susan Deddington (a maidservant)		CATHLEEN ORFORD
Mrs. Lincoln		MARY RABY
Abraham Lincoln		WILLIAM J. REA
William Tucker, Henry Hind, Elias Price, James Macintosh	Deputation from the Republican Convention	GERALD JEROME, PETER CRESWELL, WILLIAM DEXTER, FRANK MILRAY
Johnson White, Caleb Jennings	Emissaries from the Southern States	HERBERT MARSHALL, ERNEST WARBURTON
William Seward (of Lincoln's Cabinet)		NOEL SHAMMON
Hawkins (a clerk)		REGINALD DENHAM
Second Clerk		ARNOLD PILBEAM
Third Clerk		PERCY ROBINSON
Mr. Slaney (Lincoln's secretary)		A. E. FILMER
Messenger (from Fort Sumter)		H. VICTOR TANDY
Salmon Chase	of Lincoln's Cabinet	EDWIN GREENWOOD
Montgomery Blair		J. ADRIAN BYRNE
Simon Cameron		ARTHUR EWART
Caleb Smith		RICHARD COKE
Burnet Hook		JOHN DARNLEY
Gideon Welles		WILLIAM DEXTER
Edwin Stanton		HERBERT MARSHALL
Mrs. Goliath Blow		ISABEL THORNTON
Mrs. Otherley		MAUD GILL
Frederick Douglass (a negro)		JOSEPH A. DODD
General Grant (commanding the Northern Armies)		H. VICTOR TANDY
Captain Malins (his aide-de-camp)		ERNEST WARBURTON
Dennis (an orderly)		FRANK MILRAY
An Officer		ARNOLD PILBEAM
William Scott (a Northern soldier)		E. STEWART LINDER
First Soldier		REGINALD DENHAM
Second Soldier		PERCY ROBINSON
General Meade (of the North)		J. ADRIAN BYRNE
Captain Sone (his aide-de-camp)		GERALD JEROME
General Lee (commanding the armies of the South)		E. HARCOURT WILLIAMS
An Officer of his Staff		EDWIN GREENWOOD
John Wilkes Booth (Lincoln's assassin)		ARTHUR EWART
A Doctor		JOSEPH A. DODD

ABRAHAM LINCOLN—*continued*

First Gentleman	of the audience at Ford's Theatre	PETER CRESWELL
Second Gentleman		WILLIAM DEXTER
Third Gentleman		PERCY ROBINSON
An Old Gentleman		RICHARD COKE
A Young Man		NOEL SHAMMON
First Lady		ALMA BROADBRIDGE
Second Lady		DOROTHY TAYLOR
Third Lady		MAUD GILL
Fourth Lady		NANCY BYRNE
Fifth Lady		MONA GLYNNE
A Girl		BEATRICE FILMER
Attendant (of Ford's Theatre)		ARNOLD PILBEAM

Stage Decorations designed by BARRY V. JACKSON

AS YOU LIKE IT

A Comedy

By WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

April 21st, 1920

Duke (living in exile)		WILLIAM J. REA
Frederick (brother to the Duke and usurper of his dominions)		WILLIAM J. REA
Amiens		BERTRAM BINYON
Jaques (the melancholy Jaques)		HERBERT MARSHALL
Another Lord		STEPHEN THOMAS
Oliver	Sons of Sir Rowland de Bois	GEORGE HAYES
Orlando		IVAN SAMSON
Jaques		STEPHEN THOMAS
Adam (servant to Oliver)		F. CREMLIN
Le Beau		MILES MALLESON
Charles (the Duke's wrestler)		VALENTINE GRACE
Touchstone (a clown)		NIGEL PLAYFAIR
Sir Oliver Martext (a vicar)		H. GORDON
Corin	Shepherds	GEORGE HAYES
Silvius		TRISTAN RAWSON
William (a country fellow)		MILES MALLESON
Rosalind (daughter to the banished Duke)		ATHENE SEYLER
Celia (daughter to Frederick)		MARJORY HOLMAN
Phœbe (a shepherdess)		MOYNA MACGILL
Audrey (a country wench)		OLIVE WALTER

Lords, Pages, Foresters: ANGELA BADDELEY, EDITH BARTLETT, NANCY PAWLEY, D. MACARDLE

The Instrumental Music, played throughout the performance by two Solo Violins, Viola and 'Cello, has been arranged entirely from late Elizabethan sources by ARTHUR BLISS.

Scenery and Dresses designed by C. LOVAT FRASER

The Play Produced by NIGEL PLAYFAIR

APPENDIX

JOHN FERGUSON

A Play in Four Acts

By ST. JOHN G. ERVINE

February 23rd, 1920

Cast :

John Ferguson (a farmer)	WILLIAM J. REA
Sarah Ferguson (his wife)	MAIRE O'NEILL
Andrew Ferguson (his son)	HERBERT MARSHALL
Hannah Ferguson (his daughter)	MOYNA MACGILL
James Cæsar (a grocer)	J. M. KERRIGAN
Henry Witherow (a farmer and miller)	RAYMOND VALENTINE
" Clutie " John Magrath (a beggar)	MILES MALLESON
Sam Mawhinney (a postman)	F. CREMLIN
Sergeant Kernaghan, R.I.C.	J. ADRIAN BYRNE

The Play Produced by NIGEL PLAYFAIR

THE BEGGAR'S OPERA

By MR. GAY

New Settings of the Airs and Additional Music by FREDERIC AUSTIN

June 5th, 1920

Cast :

Peachum	FREDERIC AUSTIN
Lockit	ARTHUR WYNN
Macheath	FREDERICK RANALOW
Filch	ALFRED HEATHER
The Beggar	ARNOLD PILBEAM
Mrs. Peachum	ELSIE FRENCH
Polly Peachum	SYLVIA NELIS
Lucy Lockit	VIOLET MARQUESITA
Diana Trapes	BERYL FREEMAN
Jenny Diver	NONNY LOCK

Drawer: DAVID HODDER Turnkey: JACK GIRLING

Members of Macheath's Gang: ALAN TROTTER, CHARLES STAITE, MALCOLM RIGNOLD, JOHN CLIFFORD, EDWARD BARRS

Women of the Town: VERA HURST, ENID LINDSEY, ELLA MILNE, WINIFRED CHRISTIE, LILIAN STANFORD, EDITH BARTLETT, MILDRED WATSON, A. DENNISON

Scenery and Costumes designed by C. LOVAT FRASER

Dances arranged by MARIAN WILSON

Produced by NIGEL PLAYFAIR

THE WAY OF THE WORLD

A Comedy in Five Acts

By MR. CONGREVE

February 7th, 1924

Personæ Dramatis :

MEN	BY
Fainall (in love with Mrs. Marwood)	MR. ANSTRUTHER
Mirabell (in love with Mrs. Millamant)	MR. LORAINE

THE WAY OF THE WORLD—*continued*

Witwoud, Petulant	followers of Mrs. Millamant	MR. PLAYFAIR, MR. NORMAN
Sir Wilfull Witwoud (half-brother to Witwoud, and nephew to Lady Wishfort)		MR. RUSSELL
Waitwell (servant to Mirabell)		MR. SCOTT
Another Servant to Mirabell		MR. PILBEAM
Servant to Lady Wishfort		MR. WINCOTT
WOMEN		BY
Lady Wishfort (enemy to Mirabell, for having falsely pretended to love her)		MRS. YARDE
Mrs. Millamant (a fine lady, niece to Lady Wishfort, and loves Mirabell)		MRS. EVANS
Mrs. Marwood (friend to Mrs. Fainall, and likes Mirabell)		MRS. GREEN
Mrs. Fainall (daughter to Lady Wishfort, and wife to Fainall, formerly friend to Mirabell)		MRS. TAYLOR
Foible (woman to Lady Wishfort)		MRS. SIMS
Mincing (woman to Mrs. Millamant)		MRS. HILLIARD
Peggy (a maid in Lady Wishfort's House)		MRS. LANCHESTER
Betty (servant wench to the Chocolate House)		MRS. DIXON

Scene—London [1700]

Produced by NIGEL PLAYFAIR

THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR

A Comedy

By WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

December 22nd, 1923

Sir John Falstaff		ROY BYFORD
Fenton (a gentleman)		GEORGE MANSHIP
Shallow (a country Justice)		ALFRED HARRIS
Slender (cousin to Shallow)		FRANK DARCH
Ford, Page	two gentlemen dwelling at Windsor	RANDLE AYRTON, WILFRED SHINE
Sir Hugh Evans (a Welsh parson)		REGINALD BACH
Dr. Caius (a French physician)		MURRI MONCRIEFF
Host (of the Garter Inn)		NIGEL PLAYFAIR
Bardolph, Pistol, Nym	Followers of Falstaff	JOHN COLLINS, SETON BLACKDEN, ARNOLD PILBEAM
Robin (page to Falstaff)		BETTY SCORER
Simple (servant to Slender)		MARK TURNER
Rugby (servant to Dr. Caius)		GEOFFREY WINCOT
Mistress Ford		DOROTHY GREEN
Mistress Page		EDITH EVANS
Anne Page (her daughter)		PHYLLIS SHANNAW
Mistress Quickly (servant to Doctor Caius)		ELSIE FRENCH

Servants to Ford, Page, etc.

Produced by W. BRIDGES ADAMS

APPENDIX

MIDSUMMER MADNESS

A Comedy with Music, in Three Acts

Written by CLIFFORD BAX

Composed by ARMSTRONG GIBBS

July 3rd, 1924

Cast:

Pat Nolan (Pantaloon)	FREDERICK RANALOW
Chloe Mobin (Columbine)	MARJORIE DIXON
Harley Quinn (Harlequin)	HUBERT EISDELL
Mrs. Nolan (Mrs. Pascal)	MARIE TEMPEST

The Scenery, Costumes and Act-Drop designed by GEORGE SHERINGHAM

Produced by NIGEL PLAYFAIR

THE DUENNA

A Comic Opera, in Three Acts

By RICHARD BRINSLEY SHERIDAN

The Music composed and arranged by ALFRED REYNOLDS (*after* LINLEY)

October 23rd, 1924

Dramatis Personæ

Don Ferdinand	MICHAEL COLE
Don Jerome	NIGEL PLAYFAIR
Don Antonio	DENYS ERLAM
Don Carlos	GUY LEFEUVRE
Isaac Mendoza	FRANK COCHRANE
Father Paul	SCOTT RUSSELL
Lopez	ALFRED HARRIS
Donna Louisa	ELSA MACFARLANE
Donna Clara	ISOBEL MCLAREN
The Duenna	ELSIE FRENCH
Lewis	ANGELA BADDELEY
Sancho	ELSA LANCHESTER

Nuns { JOAN PITT-CHATHAM, MARJORIE DIXON

First Dancer RUPERT DOONE

Dancers: JEANNE HEWITT, JOYCE BERRY, DORIS SONN, AUBREY HICHENS, KEITH LESTER

The Dances arranged by RUPERT DOONE

Scenes, dresses and other decorations by GEORGE SHERINGHAM

Produced by NIGEL PLAYFAIR

THE RIVALS

A Comedy in Three Acts

By R. B. SHERIDAN, Esquire

March 5th, 1925

Sir Anthony Absolute	NORMAN V. NORMAN
Captain Absolute	DOUGLAS BURBIDGE
Faulkland	CLAUDE RAINS
Acres	NIGEL PLAYFAIR
Sir Lucius O'Trigger	GUY LEFEUVRE
Fag	GEOFFREY WINCOTT
David	MILES MALLESON
Thomas	SCOTT RUSSELL
Mrs. Malaprop	DOROTHY GREEN
Lydia Languish	ISABEL JEANS
Julia	BEATRIX THOMSON
Lucy	ANGELA BADDELEY

Scenes, Dresses and other Decorations by NORMAN WILKINSON, of Four Oaks

Produced by NIGEL PLAYFAIR

APPENDIX

THE CHERRY ORCHARD

A Comedy in Four Acts

By ANTON TCHEHOV

Translated by GEORGE CALDERON

May 25th, 1925

Madame Ranevsky (a landowner)	MARY GREY
Anya (her daughter)	GWENDOLEN EVANS
Barbara (her adopted daughter)	VIRGINIA ISHAM
Leonid Gayef (brother of Madame Ranevsky)	ALAN NAPIER
Lopakhin (a merchant)	FRED O'DONOVAN
Peter Trophimof (a student)	JOHN GIELGUD
Simeonof-Pishtchik (a landowner)	R. S. SMITH
Charlotte (a governess)	JANE ELLIS
Ephikhodof (a clerk)	JAMES WHALE
Dunyasha (a housemaid)	KATHLEEN MOSELEY
Firs (a manservant)	O. B. CLARENCE
Yasha (a young manservant)	BYAM SHAW
Tramp	HERBERT LUGG

Stationmaster, Post Office Official, Guests, Servants, etc.

The Play Produced by J. B. FAGAN

KINGSWAY THEATRE

POLLY

GAY'S sequel to "The Beggar's Opera," adapted by CLIFFORD BAX

The Music arranged and composed by FREDERIC AUSTIN

December 30th, 1922

Macheath (sometime disguised as Morano)	PITT-CHATHAM	Mrs. Ducat	WINIFRED HARE
Mr. Ducat	E. THORNLEY-DODGE	Dolly Trull	CONSTANCE TAYLOR
Vanderbluff	PERCY PARSONS	Betty Doxy	YVETTE ANNING
Laguerre	MURRI MONCRIEFF	Mrs. Coaxer	ETHEL MAUDE
Hacker	FRANK G. OGG	Mrs. Slammekin	VERA ROBSON
Culverin	LOUIS GARNETT	Molly Brazen	DOROTHEA GRAY
Capstan	GRANVILLE HAYES	Peggy Peeper	MAVIS BENNETT
Cutlace	EDWARD JONES	Mrs. Vixen	MURIEL SWINSTEAD
Pohetohee	HUBERT G. GORDON	Mrs. Wheedle	ELSIE HAY
Cawwawkee	HILTON OSBOURN	First Slave	IDA MCGILL
First Footman	H. GRANVILLE	Second Slave	PATIENCE PINGO
Second Footman	L. GARNETT	Polly	LILIAN DAVIES
Jenny Diver	ADRIENNE BRUNE		
Mrs. Trapes	MURIEL TERRY		

The Scenery, Costumes and Act-Drop designed by WILLIAM NICHOLSON

The Play Produced by NIGEL PLAYFAIR

(By arrangement with the Directors of the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith)

REGENT THEATRE

BODY AND SOUL

A Play in Four Acts

By ARNOLD BENNETT

September 11th, 1922

Cast:

Blanche Nixon	NAN MARRIOTT WATSON
Lady Mab Infold	VIOLA TREE
Mrs. Clews	DORA GREGORY
Edith Tunnicliff	DORIS ORMOND
Parlourmaid	HILDA DAVIES
Aaron Draper	MARTIN WALKER
Ezra Clews	CHARLES GROVES
Procopo	BALIOL HOLLOWAY
Waiter	MICHAEL HOGAN
A Voice from the Crowd	ATHOLL DOUGLAS

The Scenery and Dresses designed by DORIS ZINKEISEN.

Produced by NIGEL PLAYFAIR

REGENT THEATRE

"THE INSECT PLAY"

(" And so ad infinitum ")

In Three Acts, a Prologue and Epilogue, by the Brothers CAPEK. Freely adapted for the English Stage by NIGEL PLAYFAIR and CLIFFORD BAX, from a literal translation by PAUL SELVER

Music composed by FREDERIC AUSTIN

May 5th, 1923

Characters in the order of their appearance:

Prologue

The Tramp	EDMUND WILLARD
Lepidopterist	CLAUDE RAINS

Act 1—The Butterflies

Clytie	ANNE HYTON
Otto	F. KINSEY PEILE
Felix	JOHN GIELGUD
Iris	NOELLE SONNING
Victor	ALGERNON WEST

Butterflies:

Women—ELSA LANCHESTER, MARGOT SIEVEKING, MURIEL SWINSTEAD, ALICE MASON

Men—MAURICE BRADDELL, BRANDON PHILP, W. M. NORGATE, GEOFFREY WINCTOT

Act 2—Creepers and Crawlers

Chrysalis	JOAN MAUDE
Mr. Beetle	A. BROMLEY DAVENPORT
Mrs. Beetle	MAIRE O'NEILL
Robert Beetle	ALGERNON WEST
Ichneumon Fly	IVAN BERLYN
Larva	ELSA LANCHESTER
Mr. Cricket	ANDREW LEIGH
Mrs. Cricket	ANGELA BADDELEY
Parasite	CLAUDE RAINS

Act 3—The Ants

Blind Timekeeper	GEOFFREY WILKINSON
Chief Engineer	CLAUDE RAINS
Second Engineer	HARVEY ADAMS
Inventor	IVAN BERLYN
1st Messenger	W. M. NORGATE

"THE INSECT PLAY"—*continued*

2nd Messenger — BRANDON PHILP
Signal Officer — ATHOLL-DOUGLAS
Flag Seller — MAIRE O'NEILL
Yellow Commander — HARVEY ADAMS

Epilogue—Death and Life

Mayflies:

MARGOT SIEVEKING, MURIEL SWINSTEAD, NOELLE SONNING, ELSA LANCHESTER, GWEN ELPHIN, ANGELA BADDELEY, MARGOT ST. LEGER

1st Snail — GEOFFREY WILKINSON
2nd Snail — ANDREW LEIGH
Woodcutter — A. BROMLEY-DAVENPORT
Country Woman — ANNE HYTON
A Girl — ALICE MASON
A Boy — GEORGE AYLWARD

The Orchestra under the direction of ALFRED REYNOLDS

The Scenery and Dresses designed by DORIS ZINKEISEN

The Dances arranged by INA PELLY

Produced by NIGEL PLAYFAIR

REGENT THEATRE

ROBERT E. LEE

A Play

By JOHN DRINKWATER

June 20th, 1923

Characters:

Major Perrin	of the U.S. Army	HARVEY ADAMS
An Orderly		GEOFFREY WILKINSON
General Scott		F. KINSLEY PEILE
Robert E. Lee		FELIX AYLMER
Tom Buchanan		TRISTAN RAWSON
Ray Warrenton		HAROLD ANSTRUTHER
David Peel		CLAUDE RAINS
Duff Penner		HENRY CAINE
John Stean		ATHOLL DOUGLAS
A Girl		ALICE MASON
Elizabeth		ANNE HYTON
Mrs. Stean		MARGOT SIEVEKING
General J. E. B. Stuart	Of the Army of the Confederate States of the South	LEO G. CARROLL
His Aide		GEOFFREY WINCOTT
An Aide to General Lee		JOHN GIELGUD
A Sentry		FRANK MARTIN
Captain Mason		ATHOLL DOUGLAS
Captain Udall		MAURICE BRADDELL
General "Stonewall" Jackson		EDMUND WILLARD
Colonel Hewitt		HARVEY ADAMS
Jefferson Davis		GORDON HARKER
His Secretary		GEOFFREY WILKINSON
Mrs. Meadows		NATALIE LYNN

Ladies: MOLLY FAIRFAX, GWEN ELPHIN, MURIEL SWINSTEAD

The Scenery, Uniforms and Costumes designed by DORIS ZINKEISEN

Produced by NIGEL PLAYFAIR and THE AUTHOR

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